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Malone L. 11.

THE KING'S BANNER;

OR,

AIMÈZ LOYAUTÉ.

THE KING'S BANNER;

OR,

AIMÈZ LOYAUTÉ:

An Original, Semi-Historical Drama,

IN FOUR ACTS, AND SEVERAL TABLEAUX.

PERIOD—THE CIVIL WAR FROM 1648 TO 1660



BY

MRS. GEORGE CRESSWELL

With Five Illustrations by CAPTAIN CRESSWELL.

LONDON:—HENRY S. KING & CO.,
65, CORNHILL, AND 12, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1878.

FINISHED COMPLETE IN FIVE ACTS, JULY, 1869.
REDUCED TO FOUR, AND ENTERED AT STATIONERS' HALL, MAY, 1870.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

To

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE GENERAL LORD STRATHNAIRN,

G.C.B., G.C.S.I., D.C.L., P.C.,

LATE COMMANDER OF THE FORCES IN IRELAND,

This Volume is Dedicated by The Authoress,

AS A

TOKEN OF RESPECT AND GRATITUDE

FOR

FORMER KINDNESS.

P R E F A C E .

SEVERAL Plays of the Cavalier and Roundhead period having been lately produced on the stage, the Authoress of the present Drama begs respectfully to introduce it to the Public, on the ground that, as it was written between 1866 and 1869, it was, perhaps, the first of the series, and completed before they were known.

In writing it, the Authoress, like others, has availed herself of certain well-known historical incidents—namely, the defence of Latham House by the Countess of Derby, and the escape of Charles II. after the battle of Worcester; but in all other respects she believes it to be entirely original. The construction of the Play was at first in Five Acts, but in this form being considered too long for dramatic representation, it was reduced to Four—not, however, without considerable sacrifice of the unities of time.

The Authoress now trusted it might be available for acting; being again, however, disappointed in this respect, she pleads the example of Colonel A. B. Richards' noble play of Cromwell, and offers it for public opinion solely on its own merits, relying upon that impartial reception and consideration which every author, however previously unknown, is sure to receive at the hands of a fair-play-loving British Public.

I. S. CRESSWELL.

THE ROYAL HOSPITAL, KILMAINHAM,
DUBLIN, *November 13th*, 1873.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

KING CHARLES II.

SIR RALPH NEVILLE, *A stanch old Cavalier Nobleman. Lord of Ravenstone, Lady Laura's father.*

LORD EUSTACE ST. CLAIR, . . . *Lady Laura's lover and affianced husband.*

SIR WALTER DE LACY,	}	{ <i>First as Sir Walter, Lady Eleanor's lover, and afterwards as Maurice Jackson, a pretender to Lady Laura's hand.</i>
MAURICE JACKSON,	}	

GENERAL JACKSON, *Officer of Cromwell's Army. Afterwards possessed of Ravenstone by confiscation.*

JEREMIAH PIKE, *A Puritan-Roundhead Lawyer.*

URIAH KILLJOY, *A fanatical Dissenting Preacher, using strong arguments.*

CHAPLAIN, *The Rev. Joseph Lane, confidential friend and protector of Lady Laura.*

SIR LIONEL DE VERE, *Lady Eleanor's father. The wicked Uncle, and villain of the Piece.*

MILLER, *1st Act only. 1st Scene.*

COLONEL PRIDE,	}	{ <i>Last Act only. 1st Scene. A Roundhead Colonel. Lady Eleanor is forced to marry him, at her father's command.</i>
GENERAL MONK,	}	

ANDREW, *A faithful old servant.*

HUMPHREY, *A forester. Margery and Andrew's son.*

ENOCH AND MESSENGER,

LADY LAURA NEVILLE,

LADY ELEANOR DE VERE, . . . *A haughty brunette and coquette. Goes mad with jealousy and remorse.*

BARBARA, *Lady Eleanor's maid. An arch mischievous girl.*

MARGERY, *Lady Laura's old nurse and foster-mother.*

DAME TABITHA, *A suppositious character played by Lady Laura.*

PATIENCE, *Lady Laura's maid.*

LADY MAUD'S GHOST, *Also played by Lady Laura.*

SCENARIO
OF
THE KING'S BANNER.

AIMÈZ LOYAUTÉ:

ACT FIRST.

SCENE 1.—THE CASTLE TERRACE AT RAVENSTONE,

With Hawking Party assembled.

OPENING DIALOGUE.

Incidents—Hop-picking Ballet, by tenantry—"For the King."

SCENE 2.—THE PICTURE GALLERY (FIRST GROOVES).

The Secret.

SCENE 3.—MY LADY'S BOUDOIR.

Incidents—Serenade on the Guitar, by Sir Walter de Lacy. Lovers' Partings. Lovers' Quarrel.
The Casket of Pearls.

SCENE 4.—THE GREAT HALL OF THE CASTLE.

Full stage, hung with Armour and Trophies of the Chase.

Incidents—Sir Ralph's Last Charge. Arming and Departure of the Cavaliers for the War. Farewell Love
and Drinking Song, by Lord St. Clair.

(Composed expressly for "The King's Banner," by G. M. Sutherland, also author of the Serenade in same piece.)

END OF ACT FIRST.

Heroines' Dresses in this Act:—Lady Laura's, first scene, riding dresses of period, over others. In Picture Gallery and after—Lady Laura's, white satin trimmed with cerise and bows at berthe, and with point lace berthe and cuffs; or pale blue satin with blush roses. Lady Eleanor, amber satin trimmed with bright violet or black lace. These dresses go all through, except in third act, when Lady Laura wears black velvet with white muslin or lace cuffs and berthe, and jet ornaments; and Lady Eleanor, in first mad scene, as Colonel Pride's wife, wears silver-grey stuff gown, close coif and apron of lawn, after Roundhead fashion. In second mad scene, in forest, her old amber satin, much tattered, and torn, and hair dishevelled.

ACT SECOND.

THE SPIDER'S WEB.

SCENE 1.—PICTURE GALLERY.

Set up stage; panel and trap to work. Curtains over door at end of gallery.

Incidents—Bad News. The Wicked Uncle.

SCENE 2.—THE HOUSE AND STUDY OF JEREMIAH PIKE.

The Snare Laid. Two Old Rogues.

SCENE 3.—THE BOUDOIR.

The Delivery of the Forged Letter. Jealousy and Despair of Lady Eleanor. Barbara's Triumph.

SCENE 4.—THE ARMOURY IN THE BEACON TOWER.

Fresh Scene.—Sir Lionel's Return. Departure. Forced Marriage of Lady Eleanor. The Beggar at the Gate.

SCENE 5.—THE BOUDOIR.

Return of Sir Walter de Lacy, disguised as Vagrant. Breaking the News. Too Late. The Blow Falls.
The Soldier's Last Farewell.

END OF ACT SECOND.

ACT THIRD.

THE ROUNDHEADS' RAID.

Time, 1651; September.

SCENE 1.—ON THE BATTLEMENTS.

Or Great Hall, if necessary.

The Defiance—Effect. Firing the Beacon. Incidents.—The Fugitives. The Watch Word.

SCENE 2.—THE PICTURE GALLERY (ALMOST DARK).

Hide and Seek.

SCENE 3.—THE GREAT HALL (AGAIN).

The Feathered Messenger. The Siege. The Lost Charter. Grand Tableau. Signing the Treaty. First appearance of Maurice Jackson, the general's son (played by same young leader as Sir Walter de Lacy).

END OF ACT THIRD.

ACT FOURTH.

THE OMEN FULFILLED.

Time, about a Fortnight after the last.

(Between second mad scene, in forest, and third scene, nine years are supposed to elapse.)

SCENE 1.—LIBRARY AT COLONEL PRIDE'S.

Incidents—The Cousins. Talk of Old Times. News of Sir Walter's Death. Lady Eleanor's Madness and Despair. Lady Laura accused of Witchcraft.

SCENE 2.—IN THE FOREST, NEAR HUMPHREY'S HUT.

Wide view behind, of Forest, Rocks, and Morass; a Cave, with Maud's Cross in centre.

Events—The Wanderers. The Faithful Servant. The Mad Woman's Lament. Prediction. Final Exit. The Search after Fugitive Cavaliers, ending in Will-o'-the-wisp Effect, and Bog Adventure.

(Light music descriptive of Will-o'-the-wisp should be played to the end of this scene, after Lady Eleanor's exit. Before the solemn air during change of scene.)

(There should be solemn music for about ten minutes between this scene and next, to help imagination, unless the green curtain be allowed to drop for a few minutes while scene changes.)

SCENE 3.—GRAND SENSATION! THE ABBEY RUINS BY MOONLIGHT.

May, 1660.

Set Cloister, Towers, Gothic Arches—Ruined; Screen of Choir and Altar; Niche, right corner.

Events—First appearance of Ghost. The Power of Conscience. Second appearance of Ghost. Love's Magic.

SCENE 4.—THE ABBEY VAULTS.

The Conspirators. The Rich Widow Scheme.

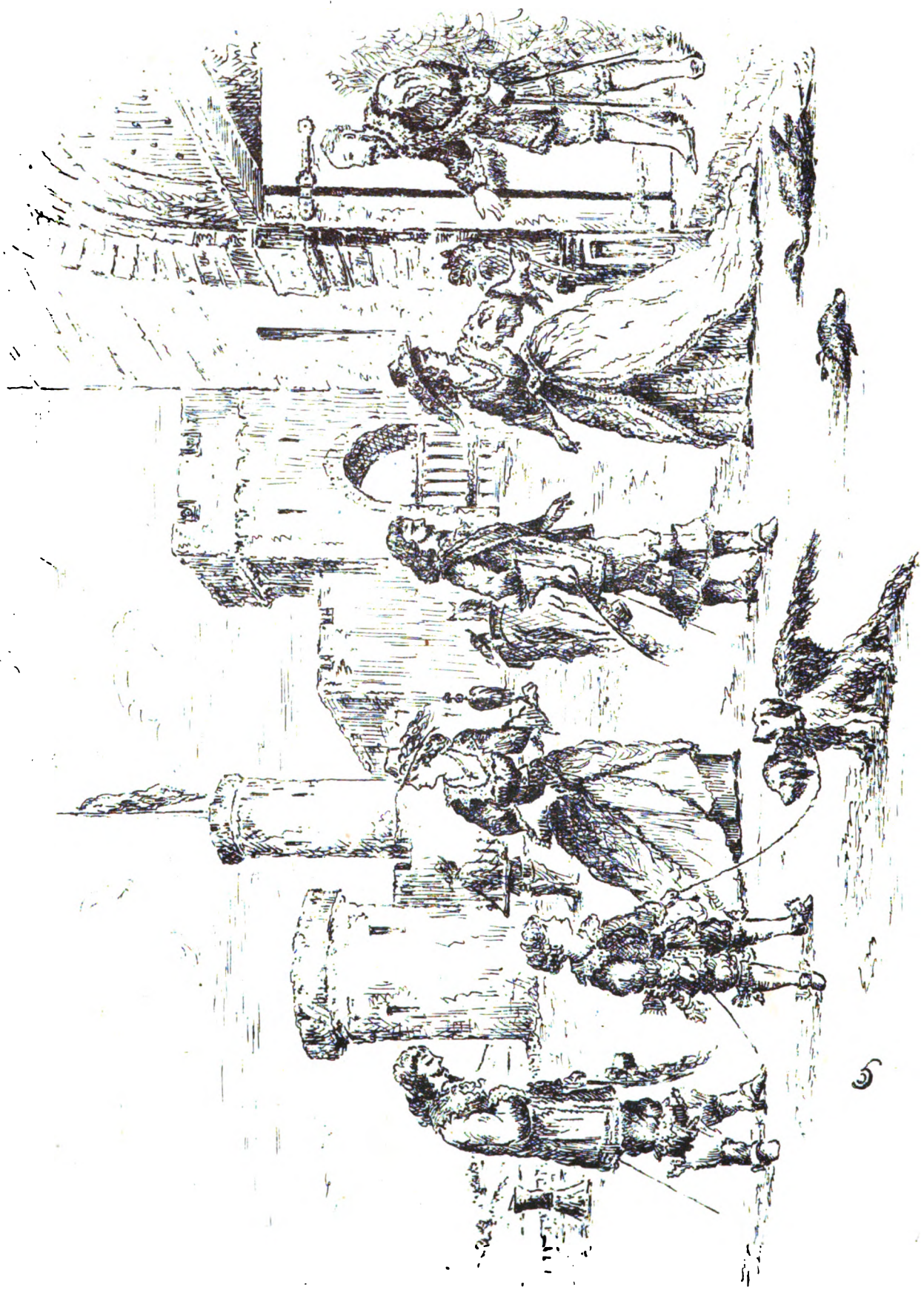
SCENE 5.—THE PICTURE GALLERY (AGAIN.)

Set in slanting grooves, far back.

Events—The Usurper's Vigil. A Striking Likeness. The Omen Fulfilled. The King Gives Check.

SCENE 6.—THE GREAT HALL (AGAIN.)

Restoration of Charles II. The Fair Witch's Punishment. St. Clair's Return. God Save the King.



"The Hawking Party."

THE KING'S BANNER;

OR,

AIMEZ LOYAUTE.

ACT FIRST.

Time of 1st Act.—The end of Autumn, 1648, when King Charles I. escaped from Carisbrooke Castle.

Places of Action.—All through the Castle and Estate of Ravenstone, in the loyal County of Kent, and sometimes in the Market Town of Ashford.

SCENE I.—*The Court-yard of Ravenstone Castle; Terrace in front of door, large enough for six people to stand on, with flight of steps; stone seats each side of door; balustrades to steps, and pillars with the Ravenstone Arms, all built out from L. 3 E.—On the R. H. to E. the Miller's Cottage and Mill, with working wheel and waterfall—River flowing away at back from R. to L., forming the moat of the Castle. In the distance—the Hop Gardens seen down R. H. on wings—Hop-poles and Hop-leaves and Flowers at R. H. 3 E.—Pavilion with tables and seats, drinking cups and flagons on tables—Flower vases to fill up L. side of stage beyond steps—Lady Eleanor discovered with Falcon on her wrist; she is toying with the bird—Servant stands by her ready to receive it—Sir Walter de Lacy is kneeling by an open Game-net L. C., near steps. Lord Eustace and Lady Laura standing by sun-dial R. C.—Servants, Falconers, and Huntsmen fill up the Stage R. Hawking—Music, to take up curtain, and about eight bars for Picture.*

Sir W. By my troth we have had a fair day's sport! How say you, ladies?

Lady E. And, pray, how should it be otherwise? When birds of royal plumage try their flight, they needs must bear away the prize: and my falcon, "Sir," King Charles's own gift, has never yet stooped but to conquer. Thinkest thou I would e'er forgive a failure? (*With scorn*)—I'd wring his neck, forsooth!

Lady L. Nay then, fair coz, be not so harsh, the best of us may fail

at times ; otherwise thou condemnest even the Royal cause, for that has failed ; alas ! how utterly, should none know better than ourselves—yet where's a nobler ? Surely, Nell, thou wouldst not now turn renegade and desert the standard that has so long been upheld by both our houses. Nor can we for a moment doubt whether Providence has deserted our Royal Falcon, even though the poor bird has fallen beneath his savage foe, and is now left to beat his wings against the bars of a cruel cage. No ! and a thousand times no ! Even thy pet falcon had not soared so high had not the good dogs caught up the true scent and started the prey for it. Andrew, see they be fed with dainty morsels from our own board.

Sir W. How like thee, gentle Laura ! Thou hast a kindly word for every living thing.

Lady E. Madam, thou hast read us quite a homily on so small a text as mine, but I beg to say that I came not here to be schooled by thee, neither will I suffer it. (*Angrily stamps her foot*).

Sir W. Nay, Lady Eleanor, I am sure your cousin meant no offence. Remember this is a free country now, where all claim liberty of speech and thought.

Lady E. (*Turning from him*). I asked for none of your interference, Sir.

Lord E. (*Advancing*). Come, friends, the dial points to nearly noon. Has the ride sharpened your appetites ? 'Tis high time we retired to change our apparel. Else shall we anger our worthy host, Sir Ralph.

Lady L. Well thought on, Eustace ; for see here comes my father. (*Turning to Lady Eleanor*). I pray your forgiveness, cousin Eleanor ; you know I meant no sermon.

Lady E. Oh ! no, of course—you never mock.

Enter Sir Ralph Neville from hall door.

Sir R. How now, my children, what sport had ye ? The sky is fair, though methinks the wind should be a trifle too high for the scent to lie well.

Sir W. Marry, Sir ! I never saw a fairer flight, and here lies our quarry (*pointing to game*), for, as my Lady Eleanor observes, "Her Falcon" never misses.

Sir R. How say you, gallants ? Do your stomachs keep true time ? I hope you will do justice to our venison pasty and canary, as this is my daughter's birth-day.

Lord E. and Sir W. That we will show you, anon, Sir.

Sir R. To table, then ; we must use despatch, as the tenants will be here shortly to celebrate it with a dance.

Sir W. (Aside). I shall have a tough bone to pick with my Lady by and bye.

Exit Lord Eustace, takes Lady Laura, and follows Sir Ralph up steps—Lady Eleanor is about to follow, when Sir Walter—first plucking a rose—stops her.

Sir W. Fair Lady, I knew it not so great a sin to fail. I pray you to do me the grace to wear this rose in token of forgiveness.

Lady E. (Crosses to steps). Nay, Sir, I cannot ; you see I am in haste ; besides (*looking at him archly*), roses, like truth, have thorns. (*Exit up steps, and off L.*)

Sir W. (Looking after her). Must it be ever thus ? Can nothing tame her ? Nothing move her ? Has she a heart ? I doubt it. Is she a woman, or am I a fool ? Yet it was not always so. They have spoilt her at Court. Oh ! Nelly, my darling ! those were happy days when first you placed your little foot upon my neck to vault into your saddle. I thought your yoke would always be as light as your fairy tread ; but times have changed, and you more than all ! Or doth she, like her Falcon, fly at higher game than poor Walter Lacy ? perhaps some sprig of Royalty ; perhaps that demon, Prince Rupert—could I but be sure. But hush ! there's treason to her in the thought. She is as proud as an eagle, as wild as a sea-bird—yet must she be lured. Oh ! could I but compass it, I would toil and wait for years, spend all I have, wealth, lands, and honours, the best years of my life, to win back her love (*tearing up rose and trampling it under foot*). Thou poor white rose, thou wert too simple to adorn so lofty a bosom ; I must find jewels forsooth ! Ha !! I have it ! My dead mother's pearls, worthy a Princess's ransom ! These will I pour at her feet. I will woo her this night with soft music, once more will I plead my cause. If I fail—I fail—we'll part, never to meet again. Kind Heaven speed my wooing. (*Exit L. 2 E.*).

Enter Humphrey and Barbara, L. to E.

Bar. Don't come near me, Sir. (*Crossing to L.*) Lying little vixen, am I, Sir ? Yet it was only at harvest home you pretended to be fond of me, and said I was the best dancer there, and that you liked black eyes better than blue ; but you men are all alike, and I don't care a bit ; there's plenty more young men only waiting for me to say the word. Why, a look would

bring stout Will Saunders, the smith, to my feet, What do you think now, Sir?

Hum. Why, that I shall be the one to get that word—eh, Barbara?

Bar. No, you won't. I don't want any of your carnying. I'm not as pretty as Miss Mabel, the miller's daughter. I'm a toad, a snake, a viper, or a wasp. Well, if I am a wasp, I can sting, so beware, Sir! If I went and told the chaplain of her goings on, Lady Laura would have them turned out of doors, she and her father, too. (*X. to R.*)

Hum. Now, what is a fellow to do, women are so awfully jealous; they are just like the new-fangled fowling-pieces, always loaded and ready to go off at a moment's notice—all bang, fizz, and splutter about nothing. In the old days there was nothing thought of having two strings to your bow; indeed, no wise man went to the wars without (*cross to Barbara*). Come, now, Barbara, I don't want to quarrel; let's make it up, and we'll be as happy as the day is long. Come, now, I promise not to dance with, or look at another girl all the evening.

Bar. Oh! It's all very well to talk, but I'll watch you, Sir, and if I find you as much as looking at that hussy, Mabel, I'll show you what I'll do.

Hum. Now, just give me a kiss to make friends again. Mind I'm your partner in the dance, as I hope soon to be for life. Come, Barbara, one kiss, won't you? Won't you? (*He takes her hand and turns her towards him, kisses her, and they go up stage L. as the villagers dance on round stage, followed by Miller and Dorothy—Servants roll on cask*).

Miller—Well footed, my lads and lasses, ye dance bravely; it almost makes me young again to see such sport. I am half inclined to take a turn with the old wife here, only we are better employed in drinking His Majesty's health, and our good landlord, Sir Ralph Neville's. Come hither, young folks, and join us in a toast; you'll not dance one whit the worse for quenching your thirst. Come, pipe and tabor, too! Marry! fiddling must be dry work under such a sun as this. (*All come up to tent and take cups, servants fill them*). Now, here's first to our Most Gracious Majesty King Charles! Success to his cause! and confusion to his enemies! (*All cheer and drink*). Here's to our Most Noble Landlord, Sir Ralph Neville! and his daughter, our bonny Lady Laura: may she and her sweetheart soon be married (*cheers repeated*). (*Killjoy enters at back of scene, and is crossing from L.U.E. to*

R.I.E., *when Miller sees him.*) Good morrow! neighbour Killjoy; wilt drink a pot of home-brewed to His Majesty's health and success?

Kill. Thou knowest very well, Master Miller, I never drink aught but water, verily the water of repentance.

Hum. (*Aside*). With now and then a drop of vinegar to give it a flavour, if one may judge by your countenance and complexion, Master Killjoy.

Kill. As for the man Charles, why, his days are ALREADY numbered.

Mill. (*starting forward*). How now, varlet! What didst thou dare affirm? King Charles's days, our most Gracious Sovereign's, already numbered! Oh! but there must be foul play in this. Good neighbours, listen to this prating fool (*Killjoy going*). Stand where thou art, man, or it will fare worse with thee.

Kill. Not so fast, good Master Miller. I verily did but mean to say that if the country continued in such a state of iniquity, and these ungodly feastings be allowed, the man you *call* King were like to suffer for it: 'tis ye, and such as that young Jezebel yonder, are likely to cause the man Charles to lose his head: but listen to me (*tries to take Barbara's hand*), while there is yet time I will snatch ye as brands from the burning.

Bar. (*Dexterously freeing herself*). Young Jezebel, forsooth! I'll make him pay for that.

Mill. Come, come, Master Killjoy, this is no meeting-house, and we want none of your preaching here; if ye be minded to let well alone, why, stay and share our frolic and good cheer; if not, be off before worse comes to thee. As to thy arguments, man, we have warrant enough in Holy Writ. Did not King David dance before the Ark when he had conquered his enemies, the Philistines?

Kill. Yes, *when he had* conquered them, verily; and indeed Naseby and Marston Moor were glorious victories (*sneeringly*); but listen and I will expound unto thee the signs of the times.

Mill. Nay; but thou shalt not expound, or we'll expound to thee with a stout oak cudgel on thy back; if thou pratest longer our trusty friends here whom thou dost condemn, will not need much expounding to transport thee to the mill-pond and the stocks.

Omnes. The canting hypocrite! Aye! Aye! Away with him! Seize him! Duck him! (*They seize him and are forcing him up stage as Lady Laura enters on Terrace*).

Lady L. (X. to C.) Good friends! What does this mean? I pray you let there be no quarrels on this day for my sake.

Mill. 'Twas but sport, my Lady. Enough! lads; let the knave go free.

Kill. I thank you, worshipful Lady, and you, too, Master Miller, for your timely aid. (*Aside*). But for this I will be avenged—go to the devil, the whole pack of ye! (*Exit, threatening them*).

Enter Sir Ralph, Lord Eustace, Lady Eleanor—the people all cheer—Sir Ralph bows to them.

Sir R. At length this dreadful war seems drawing to a close; and we may almost hope to reap the harvest of our fields without fear of its being demolished by the enemy.

Chap. Pray Heaven it may be so! good Sir; but to me it seems only a lull in the storm which may at any moment burst in fresh volleys over our devoted heads.

Lady L. Father, what mean you? how can the war be over? The end accomplished, when our Gracious Sovereign still remains a prisoner? Surely he must be liberated, restored to his throne, his rights, our ancient customs and privileges be confirmed and re-established, or we all perish with him?

Sir R. My child, thine outburst of loyalty doth put me to the blush; not but that He who reads the heart knows me for what I am, with that I rest content; and saw I but a chance of liberating my Royal Master—old as I am, I'd buckle on my sword against the rascals. But now to happier themes (*turning to Lord Eustace*). St. Clair, I would ask when you and my sweet Laura there intend to build your nest and take your flight? You know the old adage—"Happy the wooing that's not long a doing;" and in these troublous times, though she be precious as the apple of mine eye, I would fain see her anchored beside so worthy a mate.

Lady L. What! Father, art thou tired of me so soon? thou know'st I have but just told sixteen summers.

Sir R. Though a child in years, thou hast a woman's heart, a woman's wit—aye, and a rare one too.

Lady E. (*Aside—scornfully*). Marry! a child forsooth! who'd be contented with a doll, a skipping rope! Beshrew me if my father used me so, he'd rue it rarely? (*To St. Clair*). Lord Eustace, you know *children* and ladies change their minds sometimes. (*Archly*).

Lord E. When they have *any*, which is not your case, dame Eleanor.

Lady E. A challenge of wits, my Lord. Beware! I shall come off victorious in an encounter with you.

Lord E. I yield; being already the sworn mate of this sweet bird, and 'tis lest she should fly away and leave me desolate that I am anxious for you, Sir Ralph, to fix our wedding day—once more say when shall it be?

Miller. (*Advancing and interrupting them*). An, if it please you, Sir Ralph, the tenants are assembled and ready for the dance.

Sir R. Strike up pipes and tabor, and let them foot it as merrily as if this were the wedding day.

Dance.

Here ensues an original hop-picking ballet to be arranged by Ballet Master, after the Author's idea, something like a May-pole dance. The young men and girls pulling down and twining wreaths, carrying some in baskets on their heads. The old people make a show of drinking healths while the dance continues.

At end enter messenger booted and spurred R. C.

Mes. (*To Sir Ralph*). My Lord, the Duke of Hamilton bade me give you these with all speed. (*Gives despatches*).

Sir R. (*Reading rapidly—all listen*). How now! What's this!!! The Duke says there is a fresh rising in the north, another in Kent under my Lord Goring. Colchester besieged by the Earl of Holland, all mustering to rescue the King from his captivity—and I, and both of you, my Lords, are to join his standard without delay, with all the men and horses we can muster. 'Tis well. Now they shall see what an old man can do. (*To Messenger*). Give the Duke this, my pledge. (*Gives ring*). And say by sundown tomorrow we will join him. Tarry only to refresh thyself and begone. (*Exit Messenger—bowing*). Humphrey, come hither, I have need of a quick and sure messenger on this errand. Go to my good brother-in-law, Sir Lionel de Vere, at Drayton, and say I request his presence here at once on urgent matters—if he will return with thee, well. But on thy road thou must summon all my tenants and retainers. Tell them the "King's Banner" is raised again. Bid them look to their arms and horses with all speed; and be ready to assemble here in the Great Hall by this midnight, to march once more with me and these cavaliers against their ancient foes. (*Exit Humphrey*).

Lady L My father! must we part so soon?

Sir R. My child, 'tis Heaven's will and we must obey; let not thy heart fail thee, 'twill doubtless soon be over, and we shall return in triumph to our homes. Then thou shall be a bride without a week's delay. I will see thee anon; go to thy chamber now with Eleanor, and look to the ordering of my baggage. (*Eleanor and Laura exeunt up steps L. H.*) Come hither, friends, and hear me! I intend to ask my brother-in-law, Sir Lionel de Vere, this grace: to allow his daughter, the Lady Eleanor, to bear my Laura company during my absence: also to make his own home here the while, see to the ordering of my tenantry, especially in the way of arms if there be need; which God forbid! he is an accomplished soldier, and hath fought with honour all through the war.

Chap. Nay, good patron, Heaven forbid that you should trust this innocent lamb to such a crafty fox as Sir Lionel! He is in good sooth wise as the serpent, and as full of guile.

Sir R. (Haughtily). How now, Sir! What is this you dare to insinuate against mine honoured kinsman? Fox! serpent! forsooth!

Chap. 'Tis true, my liege, as that I live.

Sir R. I do misdoubt me greatly if it be as thou sayest; but still methinks some private wrong doth warp thy judgment against him; 'tis but fitting I should send for him, and if he be of baser metal than I thought, I'll prove it ere I go!!

Lord E. My Lord, I pray you will be advised in this matter of so great moment to us all, seeing how high the stake we play for; trust this good man's word, nor lightly risk the safety of your precious child by bringing in a traitor to the cause.

Sir R. Lord St. Clair, thy love doth make thee malapert. Thinkest thou my child is not as precious to me as to thee? and if aught of ill befall her through her father's counsels, my gray hairs shall answer it. Silence, Sir!

Lord E. (Bowing). I crave your pardon, my Lord.

Sir R. And now, gallants, away, bestir yourselves. Look to your arms and horses. I pray you give us leave awhile, I have need of private conference with my old friend here. I'faith my loyalty's a garment of too old a fashion to be blazoned forth in many words, yet hath it worn well!! (*Sir Ralph and Chaplain go up steps—Sir Walter, Lord Eustace, and villagers go up stage closed in.*)

SCENE II.—*Picture Gallery in 1st grooves on R flat.—Sir Roland Neville, L. H. ; Lady Maude, full length ; Lady Laura's Mother, R. C. ; Lady Laura, L. C. ; Painted on panel to slide back. The portraits face audience ; the gallery should be painted in perspective. Door L flat, with tapestry curtains over it.*

Enter Sir Ralph, Lady Laura, and Chaplain.

Sir R. Are we quite alone ? Go see, good friend, there be no eaves-droppers.

Chap. (looking round). All's safe, my Lord.

Sir R. I confide thee, my child, to the guardianship of this reverend man, whom thou hast known from infancy. Obey him, as thou wouldst myself. Of money I leave thee a goodly store ; with all our ancient plate and jewels remaining in the old oak chest in the hall. Here is the key (*gives key*), and now to trust thee with a more precious secret. See here ! in case of danger (*he touches spring in Lady Laura's picture, which slides back and discloses secret passage*)—a place of safety and a means of flight. This leads to the Abbey ruins, and thence on to a cave in the Forest close to Humphrey's hut ; also to the strong room in the Abbey vaults which in time of war hath often been used as a hiding place by mine ancestors. The secret is only known to us three, and I will instruct the worthy Chaplain in its intricacies ; but guard this knowledge well, as you value your lives, especially from Sir Lionel ; trust him not too far till thou hast proved him, though for appearance sake I leave him in joint command of this Castle.

Lady L. My father, thy will shall be my law in all things, though truly my soul doth start up amazed at such a mystery.

Chap. (Aside). Marvellously contrived I'faith !

Sir R. Hearken again, my child ! and come closer. Here (*kneels and opens small trap C, and takes out papers*), behold our Royal Charter ! The Title Deed by which we hold our lands and castle, and by which they descend without let or hindrance to our furthest posterity, whether it be male or female, direct or indirect issue. Whatever the reigning dynasty in England, none have ever dared dispute it hitherto ; for it was drawn by a wise man on our most ancient fundamental law, and is called the "Royal Charter Extraordinary." given by bold William of Normandy to thine ancestor Roland de Neville, for twice saving his Sovereign's life in battle. Look at it well both

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of ye, and notice the impression on the seal. Guard well these secrets, and ye may yet defy the worst fortune can do.

Lady L. My father, though a young and timid girl, I hope I am no craven, and here I vow to do my best devoir against our enemies, yea, to defend this castle with my very life, or use my woman's wit (perchance a surer weapon), to foil our foes and serve our most gracious liege King Charles as occasion may require; and so humbly on my knees do crave thy blessing. (*Lady L. kneels*).

Sir R. May God in Heaven bless thee, my child! sustain thee in thy loneliness, and bring back in safety thine affianced husband, and thy poor old father! Thou growest more like thy mother every day, and she *was* and is an angel. Be strong and of good courage, be true to thy trust, and the God of thy forefathers will not desert thee. But see; yonder comes my Lord St. Clair to claim his last farewell. (*Points up the gallery.*) I have already held thee too long from him. (*Laura embraces him, and exit L. 2 E.*)

Sir R. (*Looking after her.*) Would they were married! Now, friend, we must hasten, for I have much to instruct thee in. Time presses—follow me. (*Exeunt 1 E. R. H., or through picture panel, according to manager's fancy.*)

SCENE III.—*Lady Laura's boudoir. 2nd grooves window looking on garden R flat, door L 2 E. Table R. C., chair R and L. of table, couch by window, embroidery frame, curtains on window, lute on table. This scene must be made as elegant and chaste as possible. Lady Eleanor discovered working at embroidery frame. As scene opens the symphony of song is heard. Sir Walter sings first verse, Lady Eleanor second verse, and the third as duet, at the end of which Walter enters at window, and bows to Lady Eleanor.*

Sir W. Lady, did I interpret the summons of this lute aright? Me-thought it sounded like an invitation to thy bower.

Lady E. For once thou didst guess well, it was so intended. I pray thee, Sir, be seated (*courtseying*).

Sir W. (*Fervently*). Nay then, sweetest lady, if it be so I will not sit but stand: aye, rather kneel, until thou hast granted me yet a greater boon, even this dear hand (*kneels and takes her hand*) to be mine own for ever, my jewel, my talisman! my guiding star! Say but the word, and there is nothing I will

not do or dare for thy dear sake. Oh! Lady Eleanor, bethink thee we may never meet in life again. Wilt thou not give me one soft smile to cheer my path? wilt thou not speak one kindly word that shall dwell in my memory, and be a spur to lofty actions? (*Lady Eleanor half turns away not to show her emotion.*)

Lady E. (Aside). In good sooth, he is a noble lover. I fain would yield—yet my pride says no, not yet. I'll try him *just* a little longer. (*Aloud*). I wish you well, Sir Walter—in your enterprise—I'm sure.

Sir W. (Ironically). Wish me well! Oh! Nelly, those cruel words strike to my heart like icicles—when I would gladly pour forth every drop of its best blood at thy feet, if thou wouldst only share my fortunes—trust to my love. My sword shall win laurels that even thou shouldst deem worthy of thee. I would win wealth to build thee a home a Princess might envy. See! here are some pearls (*opens casket and lays it at her feet*), poor jewels enough! but the best I have, as an earnest of what I will do. They belonged to my dead mother; do thou wear them for *my sake*. Let me but clasp this bracelet on thine arm, in token that thou wilt be mine. Speak sweet, and end my agony.

Lady E. (Turning slowly—withdrawing her hand). Nay, then, Sir Walter, thinkest thou I can be bought by jewels? (*With scorn*)—I might have listened to thy pleading else; but thou little knowest proud Eleanor de Vere. Nevertheless I thank thee for this *well-meant* courtesy (*sarcastically*).

Sir W. (Starting up in anger—throwing away casket). Well-meant! courtesy, forsooth! Does she dare to taunt me thus? I, who have been the humblest and sincerest of her slaves! Oh! but I was a fool indeed to be lured thus easily, like a poor bird into the snare, by that mocking smile—by the sound of that syren voice. But know, thou fair false woman, that here I bid you farewell for ever. Here I shake off all your enchantments, and breathe myself once more. Henceforth shall honour be my only idol. On this side the grave we never meet again—beyond, who knows! But the time may come when you may bitterly rue this day's scorn—when, maybe, you would give the world for such a love as poor Walter Lacy once bore you, for such a sword to fight your battles, for such a tongue to shield your name from slander, all of which you trod upon and spurned as you would a worm in your path—aye, surely the day will come. But I am a madman to talk thus to one who has no heart; so once more, proud Eleanor de Vere, farewell for

ever! (*Rushes off by window—she stands bewildered during the closing lines of speech, and remains still after exit for a few seconds, then speaks slowly*).

Lady E. He's gone. Gone! did he say for ever (*passionately*), and I am left alone. Oh! why did I try him thus too far? Why did I not speak while there was yet time—crave his forgiveness for my petulance, and show him all that was in my heart? Oh! Walter, Walter! what would I not give for one more word from thee of love and pardon; perhaps he will yet relent; perhaps there is yet time. I will send to him—nay, go to him myself. (*X to L. D.*) What! Ho! My page without there!!! (*Sound of horse-galloping heard—rushes quickly to window*). 'Tis he!!! Stay! (*Waves handkerchief*.) Walter, stay! He hears me not. He looks not once behind him. He's gone! Gone for ever! Ah, me! I am lost! Undone! (*Staggers off, weeping, through window*).

Music.

Enter Lady Laura, followed by Lord Eustace, who has a bouquet of flowers.

Lord E. Here are pansies—by some called heartsease—and forget-me-nots, which will you have, Lady?

Lady L. Canst thou ask me? How should my heart know ease whilst thou art away—nay, but I will have the little purple flowers. (*Takes forget-me-nots and places them in her bosom*).

Lord E. Be it so, my love, and yet I prefer the old French name for these flowers, pensées. Surely I shall do nought but think of thee during mine absence. The time draws on apace when I must leave thee, dear one, and yet I leave a thousand things unsaid. Oh! could I but stay the wings of time, and make him prisoner for awhile, till I had looked my fill on those dear eyes—till I had said all that was in my heart—methinks he would stand still for ever; but, here, I leave a token with thee. Look at this portrait—I know thou'lt prize it. Tell me, dearest, is it not very like? (*Produces miniature of himself*).

Lady L. 'Tis but the shadow of thyself, and yet 'tis precious (*kissing it*). See, I will wear it in my bosom as a relic. It shall be my close companion night and day. When my spirits sink I will hold converse with it. I thank thee, Eustace, for this most dear gift; but think not if I shall need even this poor token of thy love to keep me constant. "The soul doth burst the body's narrow bounds, and at night, when all is silent, wanders at large and

holds free converse with its kindred spirits. We shall meet often in our dreams—in our prayers always.”

Lord E. Thou’lt hover over me like a guardian angel to shield me from all harm.

Lady L. Would it were possible.

Lord E. But listen, sweet-heart, hast thou no token to exchange with mine? I hold thy glove. Even that poor covering of thy soft, white hand I prize most truly; but ’tis only as a hostage for something better. I would carry away with me some part of thy dear self—thy warm, living, breathing, loving, beauteous self. Canst thou not spare one of these? (*touching her curls*).

Lady L. Even as thou wilt, my Lord, seeing I am all thine own in body, soul, and spirit. (*Offers scissors from her girdle or chatelaine*).

Lord E. Yet ’tis too great a boon. I would not harm a hair of thy dear head. I am almost tempted to claim the whole at once instead of one fair curl.

Lady L. Alas! that may not be; yet spare not to take the best I have as a keepsake: for time presses. Ah! Eustace, perchance I shall be an old, old woman, and these curls turned grey before we meet again, and thou’lt not know me. (*Weeps bitterly*).

Lord E. Nay, Laura, that can never be, so long as that true soul of thine shines through the window of thine eye. It is the immortal spirit that makes thee beautiful, and holds my heart in thrall. Even as a good blade strikes home to the last, however worn and shabby be the poor case that holds it. (*Cuts off curl*). Here I swear by this dear token, which I will treasure next my heart even as an amulet, to be thy true love while I live, come weal, come woe. (*Kisses her, and places lock of hair in his doublet*). But listen, love! These are times of peril: here is a ring which, I pray thee, wear for my sake. See! ’tis a signet ring, and hath two slides; this contains a deadly poison! (*opening it*) and this (*opening second slide*) its most sure antidote. I had it a dying gift from a rare philosopher, and Doctor of Medicine, with whom I passed some days of my youth. We know not what may happen in these sad times. I pray thee bury this secret in thy inmost soul, and swear only to use it in case of direst need—to save thy life or honour from our foes, or the life of thy dearest earthly friend. (*Puts ring on her finger*).

Lady L. I swear to be none other’s bride but thine, and to use this ring only in case of direst need—either to save my life or honour from our enemies,

or thine's, Eustace, or my dear father's. Surely we are wedded in the sight of Heaven, my Lord. I feel as if nothing now could part us, and sure I am that He will bless our cause.

Lord E. Amen! (*He embraces her—Trumpets heard.*) Hark! 'Tis the summons—we must away. (*Exeunt L. H. 1 E.*)

SCENE IV.—*Great Hall of the Castle, Norman style, full stage, great doors C.—Trophies of Arms and Chase, on Wings—Raised Dais and State Chair R. to E., oblique to audience—Banner of Ravenstone behind Chair Stool on R. of Chair—Groups of Armed Men and Peasants in the Hall—Andrew and Humphrey distributing Arms—Sir Ralph seated—Sir Lionel standing on his left, Chaplain on his right—Large Sconces light the Hall, Table R. with Drinking Cups and Flagons.*

Sir R. Here comes my child. (*Enter Lord Eustace and Lady Laura—She seats herself by her father.*) Good brother, to your care, jointly with this worthy man, under Heaven I commend her, together with the charge of mine estate, though I purpose that my ancient friend and steward, the Chaplain, should be chief banker, and render me a strict account from time to time of all moneys. He has been long used to the office; but to thee, in case of an attack by an adversary, do I look to defend this Castle; command the garrison, and so forth, though my daughter will share your councils therein. I charge ye all to hold the Castle to the last extremity. Proud Ravenstone hath never yet lowered its standard to an enemy, though its walls are somewhat battered, 'tis true. Above all, guard my child well: thou hast a daughter of thine own; and as thou dealest well or ill with mine, so my blessing or my curse attend thee! Markest thou me!!!

Sir L. Truly do I, good brother. (*Aside.*) By my troth! a goodly heritage. (*Aloud.*) Sir Ralph, you do me too much honour in this matter; and here I humbly kiss your hands in token of fealty. (*To Lady Laura.*) Fair maid! I greet you with a kiss of peace. I am sure we shall be most excellent friends. (*Goes to kiss her, she draws back.*)

Lady L. By your leave, good uncle, I kiss none but my father. But here's my hand.

Sir L. (*Bitterly.*) Oh! ho! My lady is too proud and nice—she kisses “no one” but her father, we shall see anon.—Humph.

Lord E. (Aside uneasily). I like not the fellow's looks. My faith! he is too ready with his kisses. I fear me he is a Judas.

Sir R. (Rising.) And now, good brother, we would be private a little while; this worthy gentleman will conduct you to your daughter's apartment, where supper shall be served, and we will summon you again ere our departure. (*Chaplain sees Sir Lionel out L. U. E.*) And now (*to Andrew*), mine ancient squire, come and buckle on my armour.

And. Alack a day! I never thought to harness your Lordship and stay at home myself. I fear me your worship's grown too stout for it.

Sir R. Nay, Andrew, it doth fit the time, though it hath seen verily many a good day's hard fighting; but man, thou art too old and stiff to follow me. Besides I leave thee to keep order in the Hall, and guard my daughter's safety.

And. Aye marry! she'll need a trusty watch dog, now the wolf's so near. That will I do, Sir Ralph, to the last drop of my blood—God bless her! and send your Lordship safe home again!

Lady L. Nay, father, I myself will buckle on thy sword and spurs. (*She kneels down to perform the office.*)

Sir R. Be it so, child, they will be doubly keen. But wilt thou not also lend thine aid to my Lord Eustace there. (*She goes to Eustace after she has buckled her father's spurs.*)

Lady L. Let me be your squire this time, my Lord. (*Hands sword and fastens it.*)

Sir R. But where is Sir Walter? He was not wont to be the last in feast or fray.

And. Marry! my Lord, he called for his horse about sundown, and rode forth in great haste and anger. Would brook no question, but bade me tell you he would meet you to-night, an hour after twelve, by the Devil's Bridge, at the far end of the wood.

Sir R. I fear me he and Eleanor have had a quarrel, but lovers seem to like sparring for the sake of reconciliation; yet 'tis pity to part in anger on the eve of battle, when who knows what may befall?

Lord E. (To Lady Laura.) Lady, this is too great an honour, my sword must now be evermore victorious, since it hath been touched by thy fairy hands. (*Kisses her hand, and she turns to help her father. Chaplain enters and speaks to Sir Ralph in dumb show. Lady Laura goes up stage with Eustace, he takes a parting kiss as Sir Lionel comes on.*)

Sir L. (Aside). So, my fair niece ! I come a trifle too soon, she never kisses any one but her father, forsooth. God speed you, Sir Ralph !

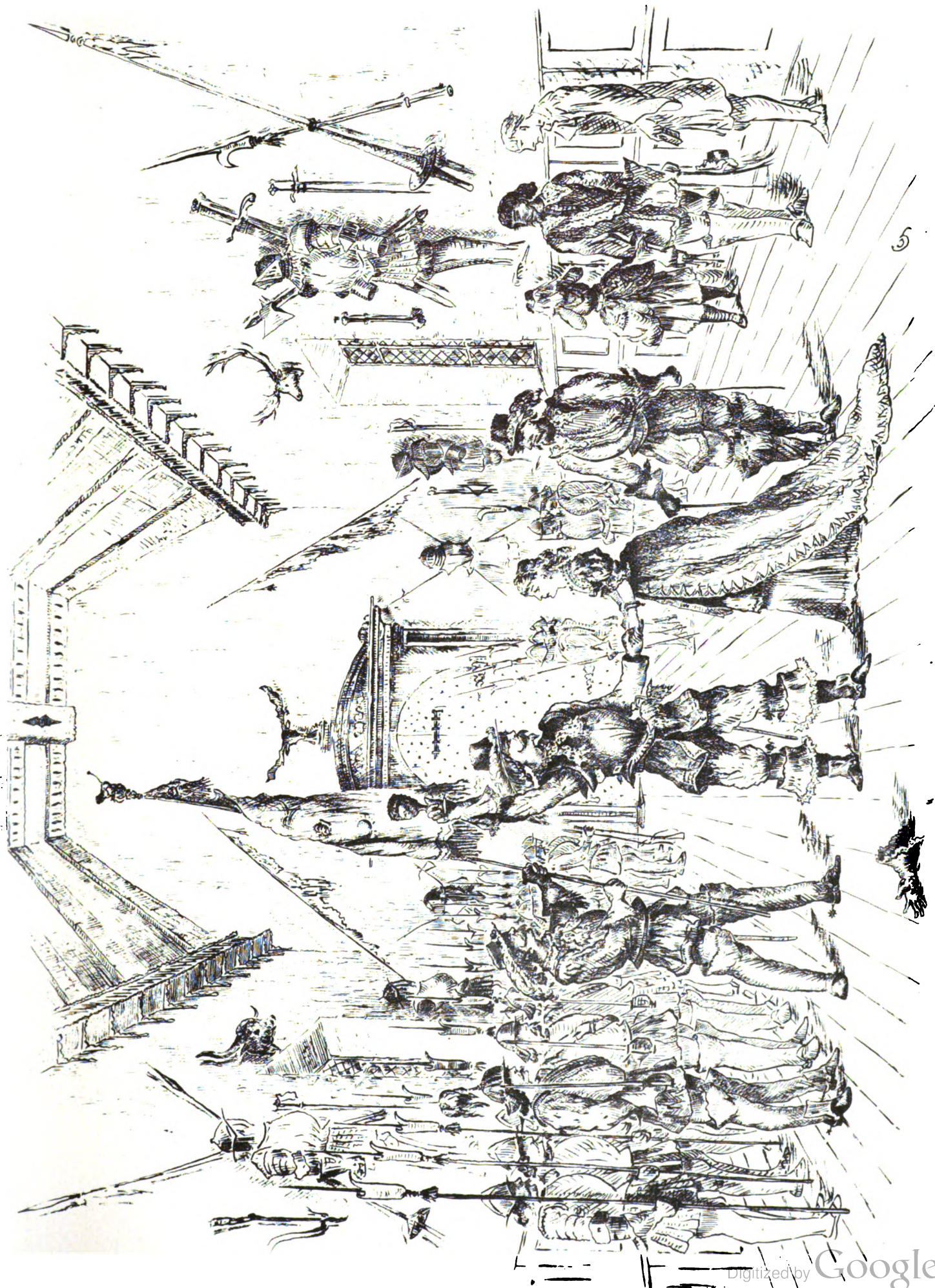
Lady L. (To her father). My father ! bless me ere you go.

Sir R. Bless thee my child ! The blessing of Heaven rest on thee and all here for evermore. Now friends, the Stirrup Cup and parting song ; and then to horse, St. Clair !

Andrew goes to table and brings down large silver tankard, which he gives to Sir Ralph, who drinks and passes it to Laura. She gives it to St. Clair, who sings a song, and at end of chorus the curtain comes down as cavaliers and retainers are marching out. Lady Laura on dais, waving her handkerchief.

Second Grand Tableau, Illustrated.

END OF ACT I.



5

"The glorious cause."

ACT SECOND.

THE SPIDER'S WEB.

Time.—This Act begins about a fortnight after the first, 1648.

Between Scenes II and III a lapse of three years, till September, 1651—just before the Battle of Worcester.

SCENE I.—*Picture Gallery set up stage 3rd grooves. Lady Laura discovered walking up and down—The Secret.*

Enter Chaplain L. 1 E., with despatches.

Lady L. How now, good father; what news bring you? Tell me the worst at once, there is no torture the cruelest can devise like the dull agony of suspense. My father—he is not dead?

Chap. No, no, my sweet child, it is not that—Heaven be thanked! but bad enough. Come, muster up thy courage; calm thee, and thou shalt hear all.

Lady L. I am calm. Proceed.

Chap. The King's army has been totally routed by Cromwell's men at Nonsuch, and many prisoners taken, among them thy noble father and Lord St. Clair; but some have escaped.

Lady L. Oh! Heaven! I am undone! Our cause is lost! My father in their power; but I cannot believe thee, 'tis mere rumour until at least I have some sure tokens.

Chap. (Bowing and giving letters). Lady, tis here, assure thyself.

Lady L. (Opening them). Ah! 'tis my father's hand, what says he? "To my dear daughter, the Lady Laura Neville, Greeting! My child, know by this that for the present our arms have suffered a sad reverse. I and my Lord Eustace are now close prisoners in Warwick Castle, but hope soon, by God's favour, to be brought to our trial before Parliament, or effect our escape from hence; yet take comfort for I am in right good health, having suffered no scathe in battle, and as for food and lodging, being well maintained, I desire that thou offer no ransom for me as yet, nevertheless thou mayest acquaint thine uncle, Sir Lionel, of my misfortune; but if thou be attacked, defend thyself to the last extremity, specially remembering my charge to thee

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concerning these secrets thou rememberest, in case of defeat, they may serve thee well. Thou mayest safely trust this messenger with thy reply, and so farewell, my child! commending thee to God's holy keeping, I rest, thy loving father, Ralph Neville." (*Enter Sir Lionel at door*). Oh! dear, kind, father, thou shalt be obeyed unto the letter. I think our secret is quite safe. (*She opens trap*). Yes, there it lies, all unsuspected still.

Chap. Hush! my child, speak not so loud. There may be listeners, and we may mar all. (*Sir Lionel watches them through curtains of door*.) Come to thy chamber, we will converse more freely on this topic. Send for Sir Lionel and advise him of Sir Ralph's captivity, though I half mistrust him, the sly knave; still 'tis thy sire's command, and must be obeyed at all hazards.

Lady L. I crave your pardon. I shall be wiser anon. (*She closes trap*). See, here's a token from my Lord Eustace too!

Chap. That thou mayst read at thy leisure. What care I for love's rhapsodies! Come, let's seek thine uncle. (*Exeunt L. 1 E. together*).

Sir L. (*Advances—watching them*). Ah! Ha! My fair niece! So in thy pretty innocence thou hast discovered thine own secret to me. Verily women all are fools. Let's see what we have here—jewels and gold, I trow; but how to find the clue to it. I'd swear 'twas on this very spot. (*Searches and at last touches spring*). Ah! Here it is. The Royal Charter Extraordinary. (*Holding it up*). It must be of great value, else had my brother Ralph not hidden it here, or set such store by it. Beshrew me that I am no clerk. I wonder what it really is. A charm, perhaps, against defeat, or a poison. (*Smelling it*). I'll take it to worthy Master Pike, the lawyer, he'll soon know what it means, and if its worth anything at all I'll off at once to the Parliament, and make it over to old Noll, on condition he spares my estate, and pardons my bearing arms against him so far. No, no, on second thoughts I'll leave it here till I've told Master Pike, and instruct one of Noll's generals, whom he will doubtless send to attack this castle, where to find it. It shall serve as a very pretty bait to my mouse-trap. My lady niece will be caught in the snare, and I shall be avenged on her and her father. I'll then make Eleanor espouse the said general, and so keep my finger in the pie. Ha! ha! (*Closes trap*). A fine scheme!—thus I shall kill two birds with one stone. (*Rubs his hands joyfully and exit at door*).

END OF SCENE I.

THE SNARE LAID.

SCENE II.—*Office of Jeremiah Pike in 1st Grooves—Table, two Chairs brought on, writing materials on Table and Deed Box and Desk—Pike enters L.*

Pike. I wonder what the next turn of the wheel will bring? This rising in the King's favour was most unlooked for. Will he conquer? Will he yet escape them? I trow not. Yet if he does he'll doubtless make some folks' heads dance to a quicker tune than they'll fancy, I warrant. But the odds are all against him. Could I but be *sure* which way my patron, Sir Lionel de Vere, inclines, I'd shape my course accordingly. (*Knock*). Who's there? 'tis too late for a client, and yet 'tis market day; perhaps a post with news of the battle. (*Knock*). Who's there?

Sir L. Open the door to a friend in haste. (*He opens door L.*)

Pike. What! Sir Lionel de Vere! my most honoured patron. (*Enter Sir Lionel*). I trust there are no evil tidings, Sir Lionel. I crave your pardon for keeping you so long without, but my servant Enoch is absent, and I was deeply engrossed.

Sir L. Deeply engrossed: in your own calf-skin, eh, neighbour Pike? Confound it, man! you ring curfew early here; it wants more than an hour to sundown yet.

Pike. 'Tis true, Sir, but you know the times are wild and dangerous, and *we* men of business must be circumspect in our affairs. But what news of the battle, my Lord?

Sir L. Great news! glorious news! The Royalists have been totally routed at Nonsuch. The King's a faster prisoner than ever, and many nobles taken—among them my worthy brother, Sir Ralph Neville, and his future son-in-law, Lord Eustace St. Clair. They are snug in Warwick Castle by this time, keeping each other company, and leaving the coast clear for you and I, Pike (*slapping him on shoulder*), to make our fortunes, for thou knowest Sir Ralph left me in joint command of the Castle, with the guardianship of my precious niece, Lady Laura; so I've authority for all I do.

Pike. (*Lifts hands and eyes to Heaven with mock piety*). The Lord be praised!

Sir L. And now, friend Pike, I want your sage advice in a difficult matter. As I was walking in the Picture Gallery at Ravenstone this afternoon, I chanced to kick my foot against something that made me stumble,

when, to my amazement, I saw a spring in the floor which opened, and under the boards was hidden a parchment roll of great antiquity. I took it up, and saw written on the back of it, the "Royal Charter Extraordinary." I marvelled much what it might be, but I concluded it must be of great value, else it had not been hidden there, and determined, as I knew thy skill in these matters, to come at once and take counsel of thee about the paper.

Pike. Hast thou the Deed with thee?

Sir L. Nay, gossip; I thought it safer, till we had arranged our plans, to leave it where I found it.

Pike. Verily, thou hast found a pearl of great price! Why, man, that Charter is the Title Deed by which Sir Ralph and his heirs hold possession of the Castle and all the Estates. No matter what dynasty is reigning, none have ever called it in question. It has held good for near six centuries. Could we but gain possession of it, their tenure would be of short duration. I know it to be so of a surety, for my father was once employed by Sir Ralph as his lawyer, before these civil strifes began, and he transmitted the secret to me when dying; but I thought it had been removed since then.

Sir L. I can easily return and secure it to-night, if that be your advice. My niece is a mere baby, a fool, but I fear my daughter Eleanor; she is on the high ropes just now, and as fierce as a tigress. In the flush of success I did but hint part of my scheme to her, which is, to go to General Cromwell at once, inform him of the defenceless state of Ravenstone, and the hiding-place of the Charter, and so make my own peace with him, and secure my pardon and my own Estate, if not a rich reward besides. But she turned upon me ere my secret was out—called me rogue and traitor, and threatened to inform the King and my niece against me. Now I can't afford this just yet; I must see my way a little clearer first. I had enough to do to pacify her afterwards, and convince her of my honesty. I must not raise her suspicions again too soon, if we can help it. Part of my scheme was to blind my niece, so I made a profession of zeal for father and lover, and she thinks I am off to London straight to obtain their pardon.

Pike. So far, so good. Thou must not appear at Ravenstone yet awhile. We have a delicate net to weave, and must go cautiously to work, for sometimes women are *sharper* than we think, *all women will forget* if you give them *long* enough. Do as thou hast said; go to London and apprise bold Oliver of this snug patrimony; he will doubtless send down one of his

Generals to attack the Castle; tell him where to find the Charter, and leave the rest to me. I will keep watch and ward over Ravenstone in thine absence.

Sir L. Yes, and lose the prize, and be made a cat's paw of. In troth, a goodly joke!

Pike. What, with *me* to guard your interest! I am deeply wounded, Sir Lionel, by your *want* of confidence.

Sir L. Be not offended, gossip. But I have it. I will do as thou hast said, and then marry my daughter Eleanor to the General who takes the Castle, so I shall still have a claim to some of the spoil, and thou and I will go equal shares in it.

Pike. Wilt thou swear this to me? (*eagerly*).

Sir L. Aye, that I will, on my soul.

Pike. (*Aside*). I'd rather have a safer pledge. The villain! how he tries to hide his cloven foot! (*Aloud*). Then be it so. I will use my best endeavours to help thee to this end.

Sir L. See, here is gold to prove I am in earnest. Shake hands on it, man: 'tis a bargain. Shall we wet it in some rare liquor, to bind it safer, sack, claret, or canary? (*Pike looks troubled*). Be not alarmed, gossip, I know thy cellar boasts nought but small beer of the worst description. I did but jest i'faith! I have a lively remembrance of it (*makes a wry face*)—the red herring we indulged in the last time I dined with thee—and I crave not a repetition of the treat. Oh! worthy, frugal Master Pike, thou shouldst be rich, for verily thy house-keeping cannot cost much!

Pike. You are pleased to jest, Sir Lionel, but remember these are hard times, hard times.

Sir L. But how to overcome my daughter's scruples? That's the question! Thou knowest she is as wild as a hawk, and apt to peck when ruffled.

Pike. Leave that to me. I have some knowledge in the ways of women, and 'twill go hard but I find some way to tame even her.

Sir L. If thou tamest Nelly, I'll say thou art a magician truly; but know for thy guidance that she and her lover, Sir Walter de Lacy, parted in anger when he left Ravenstone.

Pike. Enough! Thou hast given me sufficient hints. The whole superstructure shall be mine, and on it I will found a tale that shall break any

woman's resolution or her heart, perchance both. I have baits of all colours, sizes, and descriptions, to suit all kinds of fish. For your daughter I must first use long silence and neglect, then gently irritate her wounded pride, by jealousy and sharp suspicion, and kill at last with the proof of her lover's falsehood in marrying another. On the other hand, for a landing net, do thou have a wealthy, powerful suitor sighing at her feet, and 'tis ten to one that she escapes the bait.

Sir L. Marvellous angler! But pray explain your meaning clearly.

Pike. During your absence I will send a letter to Lady Laura from a Court correspondent, who shall tell her of Sir Walter's recent marriage; and this repeated to her indirectly, shall so anger her pride that she will be ready to jump at the first offer she has, out of pique. Then do you bring down your man, and the game is ours.

Sir L. But how wilt thou deliver the letter, and how counterfeit the handwriting?

Pike. Why, man, 'tis my *profession* to copy letters. I can forge any handwriting in the world. Let that not trouble thee; and as to the delivering, there's Barbara, your daughter's handmaid; I suppose she's not immaculate—not above a bribe? she visits, most market days, my old housekeeper—and even now may be in the house.

Sir L. Prithee! see if she be here, and bid her wait.

Pike rings bell—Enter Enoch.

Pike. Enoch, see if Mistress Barbara, from Ravenstone, be with Dame Dorothy; if she be, bring her here at once: tell her if she come quickly she may hear of something to her advantage. (*Exit Enoch*). Be cautious, Sir Lionel; sound her ere you trust too far.

Enter Barbara, courtesying to Sir Lionel.

Bar. Your worship wished to speak with me.

Sir L. Come hither, pretty one! Canst keep a secret?

Bar. I flatter myself so, Sir.

Sir L. Well, child, I am going on a long journey, and during my absence I wish you to pay particular attention to your Mistress. If any letters or tokens come from Sir Walter de Lacy you are to bring them to this worthy gentleman. Do you understand?

Bar. Yes, Sir.

Sir L. Indeed you are to be completely under his directions. You comprehend my meaning?

Bar. Perfectly, Sir.

Pike. You won't have much to do; only keep an eye on your Mistress, and you will by and bye have to give Lady Laura a letter, a very important letter: of course, if questioned, you know nothing of its contents.

Bar. Oh! Lor', bless you, no, Sir. I'm as innocent as a babe unborn. Don't I look like it, Sir? (*Tittering*).

Pike. You are to keep this secret, of course, and not tell any one, not even Master Humphrey.

Bar. Of course not, Sir. I think I know which side of my bread is buttered; and as to Master Humphrey, he is quite under my thumb, I can tell you.

Sir L. And if you do our bidding well, that is, Master Pike's—when I come back you shall have that splendid set of pearls Sir Walter gave your Mistress on the day they quarrelled, when the jewels were flung aside; but I have them in safe keeping. Here is a token that we are in earnest (*gives money*). Go now!

Barbara courtesies, and goes R. H.

Bar. Oh! those lovely pearls! Do you really mean it? Can I believe my ears? Oh! thank you, Sir, again, and again; fear not, I will do my part. Joy go with you, Sir! I'm sure I shall dream of them. (*Exit R. H. 1 E.*)

Sir L. That's well! I do believe some women would sell their very soul for baubles. Now, neighbour, I must on my way; our snare is laid; our hook is baited: we shall soon see with what success.

Pike. Farewell, Sir Lionel! Doubt not the issue, but trust in me; you shall be warned in due time when to return—at your service, Sir. (*Exeunt L.*)

END OF SCENE II.

SCENE III.—*Between this Scene and the last, three years are supposed to have elapsed. This Scene opens in September, 1651, contemporarily with, or just before the Battle of Worcester. The same period continues to end of Act 2.*

SCENE.—*Lady Laura, Boudoir, 2nd Grooves—Furniture as in first Act—Lady Eleanor and Lady Laura discovered.*

Lady E. Heigho! Now have we seen three summers come and go, and yet thy Sire returns not from the wars; we are still kept prisoners at large, like birds in a giant cage. Made to fly through the clear vault of Heaven and pour our songs of liberty through all the air—yet ever and anon I feel the bars—yea, though they be of gold—and bruise my wings against them. I would be free. (*Rising*). Free as the air. To come and go, and none to question me. But here are we fettered, bound, and kept within certain precincts, watched and ruled like school children, by that severe precise old man the Chaplain. Beshrew me! I'll not bear with it much longer. I'd welcome danger, love, hate, mischief, war, or anything to stir this dull stagnation. Marry! an I hear not from my father in a week, I will go hence at all hazards; but as for you, you sit there as calmly and contentedly as any nun. I marvel at you. Oh! would I were a man!

Lady L. (*Rising and laying down her work*). I prithee, patience good cousin! if you are a captive, am not I one too, and have we not a fair broad prison? Oh! how much better is our lot than that of my dear lord and father! How know I whether they be bound or free, alive or dead! and yet in obedience to his will do I remain here quietly immured, for I hold a true obedience the surest proof of love. Watching the tide of time that hath swept down in these three last sad years, full many a noble ancient monument. Our King beheaded, his son but half acknowledged, so many of our noble countrymen either slain, or exiles in a foreign land, begging their bread—and yet we still remain here unmolested in full possession of our own. Hark! the wind is rising, it sweeps on yonder harp; 'tis a good sign, we shall have tidings soon. (*She here points to an Æolian harp in window.*)

Lady E. Would it were true! but look! (*Pointing to window*). The blast does but mock us, see how it whirls the leaves still in their summer glory, far away before it; fit emblem of our hopes. Oh! Walter, Walter!

Could I but hear of thee, I might be patient. Yet sing to me, dear Laura, for thy voice hath oftentimes power to soothe my wayward spirit.

Lady L. With all my heart! What shall it be?—a sad or merry strain?

(Song here, if lady sings, if not, enter Barbara, L. 1 E). Well, Barbara, what brings thee here just now. Thou look'st right merry girl, like the bearer of good tidings—what is it?

Bar. A pedlar just now bade me give you this, my lady. He has just come from France with such a store of pretty things! See! here are some of them! *(Holds up lace and trinkets, and small hand-glass or mirror).*

Lady E. A pedlar sayest thou, child? What lovely lace. *(Looking at it).* Now we shall learn the fashions, and, ma foi, 'tis time.

Lady Laura takes the letter from Barbara.

Lady L. From France, sayest thou? And this for me instead of your mistress! 'tis passing strange! Where is the man? Let him go to the buttery and satisfy his hunger. We will see him anon, ourselves, and look at his store. Had he aught else?

Bar. (Saucily). Oh! yes, my lady, ribbons and feathers, and watches and jewels, and crucifixes, besides scissors and thimbles, and such like gear. It made one's eyes sparkle, and one's fingers itch only to look at them.

Lady E. Make haste and bring him here.

Bar. He's gone, my lady. He said he was in great haste, and dare not tarry after his errand was done; for some of Cromwell's men were after him, and he must make all speed to Bristol for his life. I only got these as a great favour for bringing the letter. *(Holds them up).*

Lady E. Go to, child! how durst thou take them or let the man go without first bringing him to us, what canst thou want with such baubles, they ill befit a waiting maid. Here, give them to me *(snatches them from her)*, and be off for a pert hussy as thou art!

Bar. Why, surely madam, every pretty woman likes to look at herself in a glass, and have a little finery sometimes, be she who she may. *(Aside.)* But my revenge is in that letter. I care not for her taunts; and they say we shall all be equals soon. *(Exit L., tossing her head).*

Lady E. Alack! I'm doomed to disappointment. But come let's hear what's in your letter, coz; I'm all impatience! read it.

Lady L. (Who has opened letter). 'Tis from my Lady Ormond. I

E

only waited till that girl was gone. Are you sure she is not listening. (*Goes to L. door, looks out, shuts it, and returns, and reads*).

“PARIS, August 2nd, 1651.

“To my Dearest Friend and former Gossip, the
“Lady Laura Neville.

“Greeting :

“My pretty prude, though the times be somewhat out of joint yet have I found a trusty messenger to bring you this letter, to the intent that you may be warned in time of what is passing in the country, and so not fall easily a prey into the enemy’s hands. I would you were as merry as we are here in this goodly city ; having a store of gallants, and much frolic and pastime both by night and day. Last night the Queen Mother (Anne of Austria), gave a great entertainment to our Queen (Henrietta Maria), who wore a dress of black velvet all embroidered with pearls, and trimmed with black lace ; a cap of the same, with a long white veil and ostrich feather—such bravery of apparel among the courtiers and ambassadors I have not seen since the good old days at Whitehall. The French Queen wore cloth of blue silver tissue, embroidered with diamonds ; and all her ladies glittered like a rainbow ; some of them were quite without *patches*, and others wore them larger, and more quaintly devised than ever ; it being the opinion of some gallants that they mar instead of heighten beauty. Mdlle. d’Orleans was presented, and danced a double Caranto with the great Louis. But we did sorely miss the Knave of Hearts (Charles II.), and his companion the Knave of Diamonds (The Duke of Buckingham), for thou knowest they are now in Scotland, where the former hath just been crowned King O’Scots. They say he went away sorely aggrieved because Mademoiselle rejected his suit ; but to my mind there were no such gallant gentlemen present, either for wit, grace in dancing, or splendid attire, as those two. They *do* say “The Knave of Hearts” doth not despair of regaining his crown, and hath many partizans in secret ; and that there is like enough to be another rising in his favour soon. I wish him success with all my heart. This I had for a fact from Sir Walter de Lacy, who is now employed by Queen Henrietta as secret messenger and bearer of despatches to England ; and I will aver that after *those other two* he is the noblest, handsomest gallant I e’er beheld ; yea, and a great favourite too

with all ladies, both French and English;* indeed so much so, that he hath just been married to one I may not name—a lady of great beauty and wit, large dowry, and her alliance held to be the best under the Crown; though at present the marriage is kept a state secret. And we did verily think him troth-plight to your cousin, the Lady Eleanor de Vere, but have heard so much of that dame's pride and coldness to her suitors, that I marvel not he should choose another partner for life. Yet I pray you, most sincerely, not to tell her ladyship of it, as it will doubtless anger her mightily, though in good sooth it serves her right. Now, kissing your hands, and wishing you well,

“I remain thy loving Gossip,

“DOROTHEA ORMOND.”

(*Aside.*) How's this? alas! poor, poor, Nelly!

Lady E. Why, what's the matter, coz? I pray you read on.

Lady L. Nay, that I cannot now. I pray you be content. There's nothing in it, at least worth the telling.

Lady E. You are strangely embarrassed. What can it mean? A mystery! Some love token or message from Lord Eustace. Come! don't deny it, my pretty cousin, have I found you out at last? You used to have no secrets from me. I'm so anxious. (*Puts her arm round Laura, who stands perplexed, holding the letter behind her back.*)

Lady L. Nay, Nelly, 'tis impossible.

Lady E. What! not one little peep? You flush and tremble, Laura. I never saw you look like this before. It must be evil tidings. Nay, but I will have it. (*Takes letter out of her hand and reads aloud to the end—then dashes it on floor, sets her foot on it.*) So villain! caitiff! do I spurn thee and thy talk of love. Thus from my heart for ever do I tear thy memory. I cannot weep, my eyelids burn with rage to think I have been held up a laughing stock to the French Court by that base man; but he shall feel my vengeance yet. I swear the insult shall be wiped out in his blood. If by no other hand, by this! (*Clenching her hand—changing to sorrow.*) Oh! Walter, Walter, my once noble lover! Why hast thou thus forsaken me? Thou saidst we should never meet in life again; but I would not believe thee

* MOST IMPORTANT STAGE DIRECTION.—Lady Laura reads aloud to “French and English,” then the rest to herself. Lady Eleanor speaks and acts upon this.

till too late ; my proud heart clung to hope, and thou has broken it. (*Buries her face in her hands, sinking on chair—weeping*).

Lady L. Nay, my poor Nelly, I prithee be calm ; it wrings my very heart with anguish to see thee thus. Thou wilt surely not believe that cruel, lying letter. It must be calumny, or vain idle gossip, at the best. And wilt thou throw away a true heart and thine own peace for ever for such an empty blast ? I'll answer for Sir Walter's honour with my life.

Lady E. Perchance ! then, you know him better than I do, cousin ; but me you know not. Think you, proud Eleanor de Vere can ever again lift up her head till such an insult be avenged ? My pride has had a heavy fall—perchance I have deserved it ; but I must yet retrieve my wounded honour by some high marriage, or hide myself for ever from the world. I ! the forsaken, rejected love of Sir Walter de Lacy, forsooth ! I ! who was made to rule and reign—ever as a Queen. But I'll seek my father, and together we will plan our revenge. I pray you go send Barbara to me. I will depart and hie me for awhile to my Aunt, the Lady Lascelles, at Heron's Court. There I shall be safe from scorn at least, and there, too, I can brood upon my wrong, till I have framed a fitting recompense. Go, go, dear Laura, your gentle spirit cannot fathom mine. I feel I could rend that cruel letter into a thousand pieces, and scatter them to the winds, till all earth and air had heard *my wrongs*, and promised me their aid.

Lady L. Nay, I will keep it safely to prove to you in time to come how much you wrong your love by doubting him. Why, faith is the very marrow and life-blood of our love !—without it, how could we exist ? Oh ! Nelly, do not leave me now : we'll help to bear each other's burdens. Do nothing rashly.

Lady E. Go ; tempt me not ! but pray for me. (*Exit Laura*).

Lady E. (*Musingly*). So it has ended this dream of all my life, and I am rightly served, but never will I own myself defeated. Henceforth my life's a blank. I care not where I go, or when I die—the sooner, perhaps, the better. But I must steel myself to *act a part*. Proud heart, be still ! (*Sinks weeping, R. H., as Barbara appears, watching from window*).

Bar. What, down at last ! The royal hart stricken like any other woman. The shaft has told, and all my slight's avenged ! The bait has taken ! Now, Master, I am sure of my reward. (*Barbara stands exultingly at back as the scene is closed in*).

SCENE IV.—*Armoury in the Beacon Tower—An Octagon Room with Armour and Arms painted on it—The Scene to be in 1st Grooves, and the centre portion, if possible, to be recessed—Enter Sir Lionel, R. 1 E., with Retainers—Lady Laura, Chaplain, Andrew, Humphrey, and Servants, L. 1 E., meeting Sir Lionel.*

Lady Laura. Good morrow ! Uncle ; you are welcome home.

Sir L. So, my fair niece, whence comest thou, I pray ? From Church or Chapel, forsooth ! from a gay hawking party, or only from a stolen meeting with thy lover in the wood yonder ? Or hast thou been plotting treason, under cover of seeking the wise woman and healing herbs ? I know her for an arrant traitress (*menacingly*). Here have I been full half an hour awaiting thee ! But beware, girl ! how thou answerest me. Thy very looks bespeak confusion.

Lady L. Uncle, what mean you ? You do much amaze me, to talk of treason thus. Your return was so sudden, so unexpected.

Sir L. Aye, sayest thou ? I meant it should be so.

Lady L. Though only this very forenoon Nelly and I did question greatly of your doings.

And. (Aside). Oh ! 'tis a true saying, talk of the devil and he's sure to appear.

Lady L. It is many a long and weary day since I did join a goodly hawking party. My lover, as you well know, is a prisoner still : unless, Oh ! too much joy ! you have procured his pardon. Say, is it so, dear Uncle ? or else why this question ? (*eagerly looking in his face*), and as for wise women and plotting treason, I did not know there was one in the village.

Sir L. Aptly answered, girl ; thou hast more wit in thy little finger than Eleanor in her whole body, with all her airs and graces.

Lady L. Oh ! Uncle, tell me of Lord Eustace and my dear, dear father. 'Tis three years since we parted, and you know you promised to use your best endeavours to set them free. Have you succeeded ? Where are they now ?

Sir L. How should I know ? Am I their gaoler ?

Lady L. What meaneth this ? Do I hear aright ? (*Kneeling pleadingly*). Oh ! but your promise, Uncle ; think of that, as you would have mercy from Heaven ! Where are they ? Give me them back. You said you had power with General Cromwell. Oh ! speak if they be not dead, for pity sake ! or am I left a hapless orphan too ?

Sir L. Where are they! Where they were, I trow, in Pontefract Castle: at least they were so when last I heard of them, about a fortnight since. I could not gain their pardons. Cromwell would not hear me. He's no such *fool*, having just seated himself in the chair of State, as to loose mad noblemen who would pluck his honours from him.

Lady L. Oh, God! In prison still! (*Aside*). And this man is a traitor to his brother.

Chap. Alas! poor child, thou art deceived, like many a one before thee, by false and fair promises, and honied words, that turn to gall and wormwood in fulfilment, like crab apples in children's mouths.

Sir L. Rise, girl, and listen to me. I propose to depart hence this very hour, and take with me my daughter. I have a husband ready for her to espouse, before to-morrow's sundown; even a gallant soldier, no less than Colonel Pride, one of Cromwell's chief officers, and highly held in estimation by his master; he will soon be only second in command, and hath, moreover, substantial proofs of favour. Wilt come to the wedding, girl? if so, thou art right welcome.

Chap. Sir, didst thou ever hear the fable of the Wolf and the Lamb? Both *drank at the same stream*, but the poor lamb dirtied the water, and one morning, *strangely enough*, was *missing*.

And. Aye, aye, or the story of the Babes in the Wood and their wicked Uncle?

Sir L. Who says I have deceived her purposely? who says I mean her harm?

Chap. Who, but thine own conscience.

They all look at him distrustfully—Tableau.

Lady L. Nay, Uncle, I cannot do your bidding in this matter. There is more reason I should stay to guard this Castle in your absence; but we will keep a feast in my cousin's honour, nevertheless. Alas! is poor Sir Walter, then, so soon forgotten?

Sir L. Peace! girl, or it shall be worse for thee (*savagely*).

Lady L. Farewell, Sir. In case of danger I do accept your offer of protection. May neither you nor my poor Nelly e'er repent to-morrow's work! May Heaven bless her marriage! But surely you will partake of some refreshment ere you go—at least the Stirrup Cup.

Sir L. No, no, there is not time. (*Aside*) Those two old rogues yonder

would poison me. (*Aloud*). Farewell, sweet niece; in case of attack by the Parliamentary troops, we crave the honour of a visit from you at Drayton, or your cousin's mansion. You have but to command us. (*Exeunt Sir Lionel and attendants, R. 1 E.*)

Hum. The curses of all honest men go with thee, villain!

Chap. Peace, my men! God will defend the right! and rather say good riddance of bad rubbish. Now, we are our own masters again. Let us use the time to best advantage—look to our arms, and strengthen our defences.

Lady L. I know not why, but methinks I breathe more freely since the door closed on my Uncle: how say you, Sir?

Chap. No marvel that; the very air is tainted with his treasons; truly, my child, thou hast had a narrow escape this time, and we must be on the alert in future against yon traitor's wiles. Marry! but by the help of Heaven and these stout hearts, we will yet defy his malice. Sir Lionel de Vere may find it harder to effect an entrance next time he visits Ravenstone Castle. Come, Andrew, my man, look to the pikes, halberds, and cross-bows. We must lose no time in preparing for an attack.

And. There be enough, your worship, to arm some fifty men, with corslet and head-piece to boot.

Chap. Do you set to work to clean and sharpen them forthwith. (*To Humphrey*). Hark ye! man, take thou the grey mare and this purse (*gives money*), and away with thee to mine host of the Blue Boar at Ashford. He is a leal man and true; and bid him furnish thee with so much lead and powder and other munitions of war as can be conveyed here under cover of a load of hay, and another filled with casks of ale to be consumed at our approaching festival in honour of Lady Eleanor's marriage. Take with thee a couple of fat bucks to give a colour to thine errand. Begone and tarry not; but on the road thou must warn all our able-bodied men to be ready to muster here in the Castle, with their wives and children, whenever they shall see the great beacon lighted on the Watch Tower. Farewell! God speed thee, lad!

Hum. Never fear me, Sir. I will be back like lightning. Now, Amazon, my bonnie lass! the time has come to try your mettle. (*Exit Humphrey, R. 1 E.*)

Chap. Now must we each and all to our several posts. Do thou, my child, consult with Margery how to bestow our expected guest. See thou

provide a goodly store of old linen and medicines for the sick and wounded. I myself have some skill in leech-craft. I will away meanwhile to take counsel with our friend the Miller about stores of flour and other food. If the worst come to the worst, we two must seek to escape by the secret stair behind the picture, which leads to the Abbey vaults.

Lady L. You shall be obeyed, Sir, to the letter. Truly doth this sad war knit all of high and low degree together in one common bond of brotherhood; nor will my father's daughter shirk her duty.

Enter Andrew, R. 1 E.

And. My Lady, my son hath just departed; but there is one at the gate who, albeit meanly clad, demands an audience of you. I cannot choose but think he is some other than he seems (*approaching her and speaking low*), for the old blood-hound tugged at his chain, and licked his hand, and fawned on him in welcome.

Lady L. (Quickly.) How sayest thou? It is, it must be my father, or Lord Eustace, admit him instantly.

Chap. 'Tis passing strange! Beware my child! these are dangerous times. What if it be some spy of thine Uncle's? Quick, hie thee to thy chamber, child. I will receive this beggar, and if he be a friend with news for thee, I'll bring him thither straight.

Lady L. (Pettishly.) 'Tis hard; the old are ever thus suspicious! What if it be my Lord. I never knew old Prince mistaken yet.

Chap. Go, go, or it will be too late. You may rely on me. (*Exit Lady Laura, Andrew, and Chaplain, R.*)

END OF SCENE IV.

SCENE V.—*Lady Laura's Boudoir. Lady Laura seated. Enter Chaplain, and Sir Walter disguised as a peasant or forester, in a dirty green, faded, or brown tunic, holding a ragged cap in his hand.*

Chap. Here is the man, my Lady.

Sir W. (To Chaplain, aside). Keep up the jest awhile, good Sir; let us see if she will recognize me.

Lady L. (To Beggar). Welcome, my friend, for such I'm sure thou art, by this good gentleman bringing thee here. Thou look'st weary and foot-sore. Come, despatch thine errand quickly if thou hast a message or token for me, and thou shalt rest anon and refresh thyself. (*Sir Walter's feelings overcome him, and he kneels at her feet—taking packet from his pocket.*)

Sir W. (Aside). The same good angel still. (*To her.*) Lady, behold the humblest of thy slaves, who brings tidings from those thou lov'st best. (*Sees her surprise.*) What, gentle Laura, know'st thou me not? or have grief and three years' hardships so changed my visage?

Lady L. (With emotion). Oh! Sir Walter Lacy, is it you indeed? I should know that voice again, or do mine ears deceive me? Rise, noble Lord! Welcome! thrice welcome! art thou to Ravenstone. We are now threatened with great danger, and shall most gladly seek your counsel at this juncture. But first tell me your news.

Sir W. I come to tell you that your father and Lord Eustace have escaped from prison, and are in health and safety. When I left them they were about to join the King's army, which is now advancing into Worcester-shire; and there is little doubt our King's and country's fate will soon be decided by a bloody battle. May Heaven speed the cause!

Lady L. Oh! joy, joy! what guerdon shall I give the bearer of such tidings.

Sir W. Your happiness and welfare are all he asks. (*Kisses her hand.*) Sir Ralph bade me apprise you, Lady, that a large body of Cromwell's Ironsides, under Colonel Jackson, are marching on to attack this castle, and will arrive doubtless ere to-morrow's sundown; but as it was known to be inhabited only by women and a few old men, they have not made the usual preparations, and doubtless expect an immediate surrender; and furthermore your gallant father bade me warn you to be wary, and ready to admit into this place whoever gave this watchword (*whispers to her—Aimez Loyauté*),

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whether they be in the guise of friends or foes. Here are letters which will give you further information of his designs. (*Gives letters.*)

Chap. May Heaven reward you for your zeal and courtesy, fair Sir ; I have business of great moment in the village, and now would crave your leave awhile. I pray you tarry here till my return. This noble damsel will most gladly entertain you in my absence. (*Exit L. 1 E.*)

Lady L. (*Opening her letters.*) I pray you, Sir, be seated.

Sir W. "I pray you, Sir, be seated." Thus she spoke when last I entered here. I've cause enough to rue that hour, and yet her memory haunts me with sweet pain. I would not part with it for worlds ; the very air is filled with tokens of her presence. (*Looks round.*) The same, and yet how changed. A sudden chill creeps o'er me. (*Shuddering.*) Tush ! this is folly. I must—I will—find words to seek my fate a second time. Lady, I pray you how fares it with your sweet cousin, the Lady Eleanor de Vere ; is she still the companion of your solitude ?

Lady L. My cousin, Sir, left me but yesterday for her father's manor ; Sir Lionel has just returned from his wanderings.

Sir W. I grieve to hear it, Madam ; but I trust I shall see her to-morrow at Drayton—my road lies that way.

Lady L. Alack ! good Sir, I cannot say ; you know my cousin's humour is most capricious ; but I would warn you, as a friend, go not to Drayton. You might find sorry welcome there—you know her father's but a churl : besides, of late a certain vile rumour hath reached her ear, that you have just been married to a fair and noble lady at the Court of France, which sorely did amaze and anger her. I myself did not believe it ; but whether it be true or false, till the mystery be solved, 'twere better, in my judgment, that you did not meet.

Sir W. Oh ! cruel fate ! must I be ever thus maligned ? I thought not, Lady, to hear so base a slander e'en repeated by those sweet lips. Yet I thank you for your faith in me ; thou hast the truer instinct of a noble heart—trust in the absent. I *married*, forsooth ! I who have worn the willow for her sake among the fairest dames that ever smiled ! She did so far outshine them all—like a diamond set in a Monarch's Crown. My beautiful ! my peerless Eleanor ! Queen of my soul ! 'tis too much wrong. Where's the base carle who dared invent the lie—that I may strangle him ? (*Here he starts forward with clenched hands.*)

Lady L. (*Laying her hand on his arm*). Nay, have patience, my Lord ; 'twas but a woman's letter after all, filled with Court gossip, and purporting to be from an old friend of mine, the Lady Ormond, who said she knew you well. (*Shows letter.*)

Sir W. (*Taking letter*). Let me look. I know her hand, and this is some base forgery, as I live ! But who's the villain ?—there's the question still. (*Crushes letter in hand*).

Lady L. (*Taking letter from him*). That we must discover, but we shall want this letter as evidence.

Sir W. I must away and undeceive thy cousin ere the slow poison rankle at her heart and drift her further from me. 'Tis true we parted last in anger, some three years ago ; but I was young then, rash, and hot-headed. I have learnt wisdom since—yea, and the language of Courts. The fault was doubtless mine, and I will seek her pardon on my knees. Thinkest thou she will yet hear me ? Time softens many things, and love like mine must needs prevail at last, as water wears away the stone by soft persistence (*going off L.*)

Lady L. (*Staying him*). Stay ! Sir Walter, stay ! I implore you do not leave me now alone, and threatened with so great a danger ! (*taking his hand*). 'Tis now too late, alas ! poor Nelly ! (*Aside*).—Great Heaven ! how shall I tell him all ? (*Aloud*).—This is not the worst ; my heart bleeds for you, but the truth must out. Ere this she is married to another ; partly from wounded pride at hearing of your fickleness, but chiefly at her father's stern command—wedded to a Republican officer, no less than Colonel Pride, one of Cromwell's chief myrmidons. I pleaded hard with tears and bended knees in your behalf ; but all was of no avail. They left me yesterday, and she was to be a bride with the morning's light. Nay, look not so on me ; what have I done ? (*Sir Walter looks vacantly a few moments, clasps his hands on his forehead, and staggers into chair, bows his head on table, weeping*). Oh ! agony ! to see a strong man weep. Would to Heaven ! I could comfort you ; but surely such love as thine will be its own reward ; and there is still the King and the cause left to fight for. (*Kneels beside him*). I feel half guilty, too, for causing thee this pain ; by and bye thou'lt hate me, even as we do the leech who probes our wound to heal it : could I have spared thee this ?

Sir W. (*Looking up*). Nay, gentle Laura, blame not thyself for what must be. Wert thou not an old friend, I should blush for thee to see me

thus unmanned. I have not shed tears since my mother died, and I, then a mere child, stood by her bier; but 'twas not grief like this! Oh! Nelly! Nelly! thou hast shamed my manhood, utterly ruined my life, wrecked all my hopes of honour and devotion to the Cause. How could'st thou believe such evidence against me? But no, my darling! I'll blame thee not, but off at once and confront thy coward husband and thy treacherous father. I'll not rest till I have snatched thee from their cruel grasp, and stained thy bridal bed with the churl's blood! By St. George and all the saints! I swear they shall feel what it is to wrong an honest and an *absent* man! Farewell! dear Laura, pray thou for my success. (*Starting up and going off, girding on his pistols and drawing his sword*).

Lady L. (*Clinging to him*). Oh! Walter, Walter! go not thus, for pity's sake; they'll butcher thee without mercy, and the sight will kill her too. Bethink thee of thine honour and the King. Art thou not his sworn and trusted servant, bound on his weighty errand, and wilt thou venture thus to turn aside for private wrong and mar his hopes for ever? Oh! bethink thee ere too late!!!

Sir W. (*After pause, in which Sir Walter gradually and reluctantly lowers his blade*). Lady, thou hast prevailed. My life at least is his till mine errand be accomplished; then will I meet my cowardly enemies in fair and open fight, and by Heaven! I swear that this good sword shall slake my vengeance, steeped to the hilt in their base blood, or I will leave my body on the field!! Let thy prayers follow me, even as wings to bear my soul to Heaven, if I fall; and let thy tears bedew my grave, from whence shall spring sweet flowers in token of my love and constancy. Tell her I died true to her. Promise me this, dear Laura.

Lady L. (*Faltering*). I promise.

Walter. And so farewell for ever in this world.

As he says this he kisses her hand, and bows low over it.

Drop descends on this Tableau, and finishes Scene and Act, as at present arranged.

END OF ACT II.

ACT THIRD.

THE ROUNDHEADS' RAID.

THE SIEGE.

Time—Still 1651—A week after Act II. It ought to be first on the battlements.

SCENE I.—*Great Hall, windows prepared for defence with barricades. The whole place prepared for resistance. Men-at-arms, Chaplain, and Lady Laura discovered. Herald and two attendants L. H., with white flag, enter after trumpets.*

Her. Lady, my master, General Jackson, sendeth thee peaceful greeting, and demandeth the instant and entire surrender of this castle and all its contents to the forces of the Parliament now ruling England, in order to spare bloodshed, having regard to thine age, and sex as a weak woman, and unlearned in the ways of war. I will await thine answer here. (*Trumpet.*)

Lady L. Go, tell thy master and all his crew, that I do hereby refuse and despise his summons to surrender; and moreover, I defy him and his to do their worst against me, in the name of my mother church, my Sovereign Lord King Charles, and my most puissant and revered father, Sir Ralph Neville, hereditary Lord of Ravenstone. Bring forth The King's Banner; as long as that waves o'er our battlements we will never cry surrender—I will defend this place with the last drop of my blood; and if I catch thee here again, thou shalt not escape with thy life, I promise thee.

Herald bows and retires—Short pause.

Chap. (*To Humphrey*). Hast all in readiness?

Hum. Everything, your Reverence.

Chap. Then to the Watch Tower, and fire thou the beacon.

Trumpet is heard, and discharge of cannon—Red light—Women, children, and tenantry cover stage.

Lady L. You are welcome all to this place of refuge.

Men. God bless your ladyship! We are ready to shed the last drop of our blood for you and your father's house—to stand or fall with Ravenstone.

Lady L. I thank you from my heart; but I charge you to be well agreed among yourselves, and in all things to obey the Chaplain's orders, and under him old Andrew's and master Humphrey's.

Men. We will obey them to the death.

Lady L. (*To Mabel.*) And now, Mabel, we will conduct you and the others to a place of safety.

Marg. Yes, come and have some supper, and let's put the little ones to bed.

Women. Heaven's blessing on your ladyship. (*Exit Lady L. and women.*)

Chap. Now, my fine fellows, we will divide you into three companies. I will command the main body here in the hall, and watch for who may come. Thou, Gaffer, and stout Will Saunders, shall have the second between ye at the west barbican. (*To Humphrey.*) And go thou to the tower, where is the petronel, with these men, and keep a sharp look out; 'twas Sir Ralph's last order that we should defend this place to the utmost extremity, and we have arms and food enough to stand a full month's siege. Woe be to that man who shall first cry surrender! If there be any traitor here amongst us, I warn him his last hour is come, for I myself will shoot him like a dog, and hurl him from the battlements. Andrew, do thou and five men of approved fidelity remain to guard the postern gate. Now to your several posts, and may God defend the right!

Men. Amen! (*Exit Humphrey and men.*)

Chap. (*To Andrew.*) Thou knowest the watchword (*Aimez Loyauté*), and at once summon me if there be need. (*He is going off when Humphrey re-enters.*)

Hum. May it please your Reverence, I come to tell you there are two men clad as troopers of the Parliament, who demand speedy admittance. What are your orders?

Chap. Good Humphrey, thou knowest the watchword, admit them not unless they give the proper countersign. (*Exit Humphrey.*) I marvel who it may be; perhaps some spy of Sir Lionel's, or an advanced guard of the enemy's troops. We must be cautious, peradventure some fugitive cavaliers from the battle seeking shelter from their enemies. (*X. R. Knock at door.*) Who goes there?

Hum. A friend!

Chap. Give the word, or advance at your peril.

Hum. (*Without*). Stay, sir, all's well ; these men are friends, not foes, in spite of their disguise. (*Enter two troopers, clad in buff and steel, as Chaplain speaks*).

Chap. Pass in, friends, ye are welcome. Whence come ye, gentlemen ?

Sir R. From Worcester fight, and I was told, by one I may not name, that we should find shelter and fair treatment here on giving the password. I am not used to be thus rudely questioned, but conduct me to the mistress of this mansion, and I will tell mine errand soon enough.

Chap. This way, good sirs—I will myself conduct you to her ladyship. (*Aside*).—My mind misgives me—can it be Sir Ralph ? (*Goes up stage—Scene closes*).

END OF SCENE I.

SCENE II.—*Picture Gallery 3rd grooves—Lady Laura enters R. with Chaplain—Meeting Sir Ralph and King—Lights down. Called "Hide and Seek."*

Lady L. What do I see! Oh! Heaven! Are we already in the hands of our enemies?

(*Sir Ralph takes off hat and beard—Laura recognizes him—Rushes to his embrace*).

Sir R. Nay, sweet, but in thy father's arms.

Lady L. Thank Heaven at last, in our hour of need—we shall at least die together. (*To Charles, who is disguised to resemble Lord Eustace*). And thou too, Eustace! Oh, my love! This is too much joy at once for my poor heart to bear, so long fed upon doubt. (*Charles takes her in his arms and kisses her, before she perceives the error, and draws back to her father. Charles uncovers his head, and speaks to Sir Ralph, who starts forward*).

Char. Nay, my good Lord, I crave your pardon for this liberty; but such a sweet fresh budding rose as this your daughter is seldom met. 'Twere sin to pass and leave the honey of her lips untouched—'tis worth the thorns of your displeasure; besides, did you not bid me play Lord Eustace's part unto the *very life*? I have your own word for it, and by my halidome! a right pleasant part it is too.

Lady L. (*Sobbing*). Oh! my father, what shame is this? How dare this man presume to jest thus with mine honour? And you, why stand you by and suffer it?

Sir R. (*Caressingly*). Hush! darling, 'tis your Sovereign Lord, King Charles. I cannot gainsay him, though I would warn you, Sire, to be more discreet in future.

Lady L. The King! Can I believe my senses? (*After pause*). If true, then do I crave your Majesty's pardon for my petulance; but blush not for my woman's indignation, though I warn you not to try the like again. Yet here, my sovereign liege, do I tender you my most loving duty and service.

Char. I bless the fortune of war that sent me to so fair and true a champion. I would gladly remain a prisoner here for months to gaze on so much beauty.

Lady L. I like not flatteries, my liege. (*To Sir Ralph*). But tell me, my father, what happy chance sent me back you and so honoured a guest at this critical juncture?

Sir R. Simply this—we are both fugitives from Worcester fight, where all was lost but honour. In the thick of the battle, poor Sir Walter de Lacy fell covered with wounds of his own seeking, from the hands of Sir Lionel de Vere, and Colonel Pride—our Nelly's husband, both renegades together. He blessed her with his latest breath, and so hotly pressed were we that we scarce dared stay to close his eyes—far less to bury him; and there he lies, with many another gallant soldier, bleaching in the sun.

Lady L. Oh, horror!

Sir R. I urged the King to flight. I and Lord Eustace, with Colonel Careless, my Lord of Buckingham, and others, closed around and covered him. 'Twas hot work, and even now the pursuers are on our track. Thou must e'en hide us a little space in the old nooks, my child, until their wrath be spent and we can escape. Therefore have we assumed the disguise of Roundhead troopers, the better to deceive our foes, and can drink and swagger, or rather preach and pray, and swear Puritan oaths with the best of the crop-eared knaves. I would not leave thee in this strait but for my Prince's sake. Lord Eustace is safe and sound in a house hard by; he and his comrade are gone to seek us out another refuge with some sure friends till the coast be reached; and if in the meantime, as I expect, thou art attacked by the soldiers of the Parliament, thou must defy their malice, and hold out as long as possible. I shall be near thee, and will direct thine efforts; and when we reach a place of safety I will send for thee to France, or wheresoever our fate may lead us. Say, my child, doth thy heart fail thee at this prospect? Wilt thou venture this much to save thy King?

Char. Nay, 'tis too much peril for so fair a lady to undergo for such a worthless object. She shall not risk it for me.

Lady L. Ay, but I will, my Lord. My life, my liberty, all but my honour, are yours to command, and shall be spent to the uttermost in your service; e'en if I perish in the cause what matter, so you go scathless—'twill be a fitting death for a cavalier's daughter.

Char. But what will my Lord Eustace say to this? How shall I answer it to him?

Lady L. Leave that to me.

Sir R. So be it then, my child; Heaven bless thee for thy courage! But we must hide at once. (*Lady Laura goes up*).

Lady L. There is no time to lose. (*Opens panel*). My Lord, I pray

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enter, here is a small room from which the stair leads to the Abbey vaults, thence on into the forest. I will see that refreshments be provided for you at once.

Char. Sweet lady, I thank thee for thy courtesy with all my heart ; and be assured, if Charles Stuart ever regain his father's throne, thou shalt claim what guerdon thou wilt in memory of this hour. (*Exit through the secret panel. Sir Ralph comes down with Chaplain.*)

Sir R. Well met again, old friend, even in this hour of peril ; how shall I thank thee for all thy care of her.

Chap. It needeth not, my lord, 'tis enough to look once more on you together ; but I must not linger, or leave my men alone too long—they are but freshly mustered—yet all honest souls and true, and would fight harder still did they but know whom they had among them. I would that I might bring them the joyful news of your arrival.

Sir R. Do so, if it seem good unto thee. I will myself see them anon, but guard the secret of the King's presence with your life. Say he is a friend of mine, also a fugitive cavalier. I breathe again now that he is in a place of safety ; but he is a wild youth, rash and impetuous, though of a gallant courage—warm-hearted and open-handed to a fault—and who would not fight for him ? Go, bring him with thine own hands some refreshments. I like not skulking. I, Ralph Neville, when danger's to be faced, to leave my child to fight it out alone—perchance to die !—it is not seemly for a cavalier. (*Exit Chaplain.*)

Lady L. Father, be not too rash, thou shalt not risk thy precious life—more precious than the King's (*aside*)—at least to me ; seeing thou art to be his counsellor, and guide his steps in exile. Father, have women never fought before, or given their lives for their country and their Prince ? Think of brave Joan-of-Arc—the Maid of Orleans ; what joy was her's when she had saved her lord and crowned him King under her lily banner ! Is not her name a spell and watchword among women ? What rank can surpass that gained by noble deeds. Father, we all must die sometime, and I would die like her, a martyr to my King and country's cause ; thou wouldst not surely grudge me this ! Think of the gallant Countess of Derby : how, in obedience to her lord's command, she lately kept a whole army at bay for fourteen weeks, until relieved—not vanquished—nor counted cost, nor tears, nor sleepless nights, so she achieved her purpose. And thinkest thou that I, racked by no

mother's cares, and having such a stake as my dear father's life and Sovereign's liberty, shall fight less well, be less brave than she, or grudge the very life-blood of my heart to speed the cause and save those I love best? No, never fear for me.

Sir R. My child, thou speakest like one inspired. I cannot doubt the issue of this venture. May God and all good angels guard thy head. Then listen; the night approaches and spreads her sable mantle all around, blinding our foes, and under its cover shall their prey escape their clutches. Oh! night, kind night! be as black as thou wilt for this once, and never a star appear till we be safely housed.

Lady L. Oh! night, kind night! do thou with downy slumbers seal up all eyes but ours, who look our last through blinding tears on what we best do love and watch, for their dear sakes. But must you go so soon?

Sir R. It is inevitable! My duty to my King and country calls.

Lady L. 'Tis harder now to part than if I had not met thee since the first. Yet, Heaven's will be done. (*Enter Chaplain with light and a small covered basket containing a carrier pigeon.*)

Chap. Ye must not linger, nor lose the precious hours in idle dalliance; every moment is of the utmost import to speed your flight. Know ye not that the fate of three kingdoms, for years to come, hangs on the issue of this night's adventure: therefore, away at once; your steeds await you below in thick of the forest—depart and fear not.

Sir R. So far, well have we kept the savage churls at bay. Now to summon our Royal captive.

Chap. You say well, my lord. (*Opens panel, and King Charles comes out.*)

Char. I breathe again more freely out of yon hole. Yet 'tis a famous place for "hide-and-seek."

Sir R. See that the men fortify themselves with food and sleep; and let them repair whatever breaches there may be.

Char. Ha! ha! Repair their breeches sayest thou, man? Odds fish! I reckon our breeches will need some repairs before the week's out, for it will be a devilish long day, I warrant me, before we get a new pair each.

Sir R. Ha! ha! Your Majesty is pleased to be facetious. I'm glad to see your Highness in such good spirits for your long night's ride.

Char. Why, lack-a-day, man! 'tis no use being down-hearted. I'm

quite ready for a good long ride to stretch my limbs, and whet my appetite by fresh adventures.

Sir R. When the bold huntsman cries tally-ho! to this fox breaking cover 'twill be a goodly sight, I warrant me, to see the chase. For the last time, farewell, my daughter! I take with me this bird (*takes dove from Chaplain*), well trained to carry messages; and its return here shall be the harbinger of our safety, and the signal that if too hotly pressed thou mayest surrender at discretion. Heaven bless thee! (*Kisses her*).

Lady L. Farewell! dear father! Yes, I will watch for this dear bird's return as Noah for the dove's. Adieu! and au revoir! (*Kisses hand*).

Sir Ralph and King enter secret passage, Chaplain closes it, and he and Laura exeunt. Cannons begin to fire till scene changes.

END OF SCENE II.

SCENE III.—*Great Hall. Red light seen through window, lighting up the scene.*
Cannon firing. Chaplain enters. Andrew discovered with men-at-arms.

And. Oh! woe, woe! that my old eyes should ever look on such a sight as this, the blood-thirsty wretches have fired the village, and the flames are spreading fast towards the western tower. They are now trying to cross the moat; if once they gain the other side all hope is lost. Quick! master, to the rescue—run to the beacon tower and reinforce good Humphrey and his fellows.

Chap. Send to the Lady Laura and warn her of this new danger; bid her prepare for instant flight—away. (*Exit Chap. R.*)

(*Enter Lady Laura and Margery, L.*)

Lady L. Oh! horror! what do I see? the whole village and part of the castle on fire! I fear me all our efforts cannot avail to save it; what if my poor friends and faithful followers be rendered homeless through my rashness, the burden of such a memory would drive me mad! 'Tis too dreadful a sacrifice! Had I but some token of my father's safety, I would send at once and sue for peace, and bide the issue, so my people might escape unharmed. Oh! kind Heaven! help and guide me in this strait.

Marg. Alack-a-day! lack-a-day! I fear me, my pet lamb, that our last hour is come; we must to our knees, or we shall be burnt just like the martyrs in Queen Mary's time.

Lady L. Yes, martyrs to our King and country's cause, that's all the difference. (*White bird flies in with letter under its wing, and falls wounded by a shaft from cross-bows.*)

Marg. Why, dear heart alive, what's that?

Lady L. (*Taking up bird.*) They're saved, they're saved! Oh! welcome, thou precious harbinger of love and hope! Must thou die, poor bird? So fond, so faithful. Yes, it is dead, but thou shalt have solemn burial, fit for so loyal a creature. (*Joyfully.*) Margery, by this token I know that my father and his comrade are in safety, and we may sue for peace at once. Call the Chaplain to me, say I have news for him. Breathe not a word to any on the way.

Marg. Never fear my tongue, honey, I will bring him in a trice.

Lady L. How shall I thank the fates for this most timely aid? Yes, there must be a truce at once, or our old home will soon be but a heap of

ashes. Perhaps the General may refuse to listen to me. I, Laura Neville, will stoop to sue as I have never stooped before : will humble my proud neck under the conqueror's yoke if needs be, to save my people's lives. (*Enter Chaplain, Margery, and Andrew*).

Chap. How now, my child, I hear thou hast good tidings of thy father ; is it true ?

Lady L. Yes, he is safe, thank Heaven. And we must send out a flag of truce at once, else shall we all fall victims to these cruel flames.

Chap. Thou'rt right, we will despatch a herald at once. What is that ? (*Crash and explosion*). The enemy's magazine has exploded, and scores of our foes lie buried beneath the ruins. Now will we seize the opportunity to make our peace. Humphrey, do thou bear thy lady's message.

Hum. Aye, aye, sir, 'tis well nigh time, for just as I skirted the inner wall of the court-yard I saw them digging a mine and filling it with powder.

Chap. Ha ! what sayest thou ? Hurry man to the ramparts and display a white flag ere it be too late, then bear thy lady's greeting to General Jackson, and say she humbly craves a two days' truce, that a treaty of peace may be arranged between them. Away. (*Exit Humphrey*).

Lady L. Alas ! that it must be so ; never before has a daughter of Neville stooped to such indignity. Yet let me not repine, but employ these precious moments in arranging the terms of the treaty. I will offer to surrender the entire castle and domain to him on condition that he spares my life and the lives of my faithful adherents, and gives me leave to retire unmolested from this place within twenty-four hours.

Chap. Right well said, my girl, but in order to ensure your further safety, Margery, Andrew, and Humphrey must remain behind, feigning to desert you in the hour of trial, and seek service under the new master of Ravenstone. At a sign from me you must cry off from your lady's side, pretending to see Heaven's vengeance in her misfortunes ; so after her departure ye may watch over the secrets of the house.

Marg. Oh ! my bonnie bairn ! I cannot leave thee to wander forth into the wide world alone thus—motherless, homeless, untended, and thou so young and fair, so delicately nurtured, 'twill break my heart—it will. (*Weeps*).

Lady L. 'Tis hard to part thus, dear Margery, yet 'tis but for a time, and the only way to help me.

Andrew. Desert her, I who had her in my arms the day she was born ! I'll tell you what it is, your Reverence, if any other man than you had put such a thing to me, I'd have laid him on the broad of his back for it, old as I am, as sure as my name is Andrew. I'd never take service under a low-born rascal of a Roundhead general.

Chap. Then we are undone, for I and your lady must travel hence alone. (*Enter Humphrey*). Now, Humphrey, lad ! what news, will he listen to terms ?

Hum. He will, sir, but they must be his own. The old rogue chuckled with glee when he saw the white flag ; he had a mind to punish my lady at first, pretty severely, but his son, Captain Maurice, persuaded him off it. A noble, civil spoken, gentleman as ever I saw, though he be a Roundhead, and he's coming directly to arrange the terms with her ladyship ; and now, father and mother, you and I must do exactly as his Reverence orders us, for our lady's good.

Marg. Well, lad, thy old mother will follow thy counsel, only let me know exactly what I am to do.

Andrew. Well, if my wife and son are determined to stick by each other, I reckon I'd better cast in my lot with them. We'll sink or swim together. Your Ladyship shall be obeyed to the letter.

Lady L. Margery, follow me an instant. (*They retire up stage and converse a few seconds, then Lady Laura seats herself in her chair*).

(*Trumpet sounds—Enter Maurice and officers*).

Maur. Lady, I come in obedience to your summons ; and my father, General Jackson's orders to arrange a treaty of peace between you and him. See, here are the terms he proposes. (*Reads paper*). I, General Jackson, propose that the said Laura Neville do hereby render up the castle and domain of Ravenstone, with all properties, persons, revenues, and effects thereunto appertaining—to me, the said General Jackson, now commanding the forces of the Parliament, to be disposed of according to my good will and pleasure ; on the condition, wholly and solely, that her life and liberty shall be spared, and that she have leave to depart hence wheresoever she list, within the space of twenty-four hours from this present, until which time she and all belonging to her shall be regarded as prisoners of war.

Lady L. Sir, although a helpless and distressed woman, I will sooner die than yield to such harsh measures. I demand, therefore, that not only

my life, honour, and liberty shall be respected, but also the lives and liberties of all my trusted followers, and that they shall have leave to return unmolested to their homes ; and further, I demand the right to carry away with me such of my jewels and wearing apparel as shall seem good to me, on condition of my yielding up to General Jackson this castle and domain. Know that I would rather die than yield to dishonourable terms, and 'tis but to save the lives of my trusty adherents that I condescend to treat with you at all. Now, sir, I want your answer.

Maur. Madam, my father is a stern man, yet will I use all my power to prevail on him to grant these conditions, though, mayhap, he will further require to search the castle from turret to cellar, before concluding the treaty. Know he suspected thee of harbouring certain malignants here, even the young man, Charles Stuart.

Chap. Sayest thou so, my friend ? he is at perfect liberty to do so if he pleases.

Lady L. Captain Maurice, go, do as thou hast said without delay ; I will abide the issue. (*Goes up stage*)

Maur. What marvellous courage ! What an angel of grace and beauty ! what a noble mien ! how fair and sweet her speech ! I'd brook even the Lord General's and my father's wrath to serve her. Madam, I go to meet my father to conclude the matter. Meantime fear no intrusion. (*Bows and exit with officers*).

Lady L. Now let us use these precious moments to secure what gear and treasure we may.

Chap. I rejoice to see thy spirits rise with this emergency. (*Goes to chest, takes money*). We shall need some provisions for our journey, and as the old fox is sure to search our coffers, we will not leave them too thickly lined. I will away and hide this without delay.

Marg. Could'nt you hide my lady, too ? I know that Lord General will be seeking to do her hurt. There's a score of places.

Chap. Yes, Margery, I could hide her fast enough if she would consent to it. How sayest thou, my child ?

Lady L. I hide ! and the treaty not yet signed ? You little know me. But go and see that our secret be still safe. (*To Margery*). Mind you do your part well ; mislead the General and all his folks, especially if that canting hypocrite, Uriah Killjoy, be of the company. You'll have to show them over

the castle, and you must pretend to be very wise, and able to tell them all kinds of secrets by-and-bye.

Marg. Oh! yes, my lady, and a pretty dance I'll lead them—out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Lady L. But mind you do nothing to irritate them till the treaty is signed, and the Chaplain and the rest are safe away; let them have their fill in the buttery, and so forth.

Marg. Your orders shall be obeyed, madam, but it grieves me sorely to be obliged to cook for such beggarly knaves; I who have roasted venison and fat capons for his late Majesty of blessed memory, when on his royal progress from Nottingham. But I'll cook their goose for them some day, never fear.

Andrew. And if it please your ladyship, I'll take care they drink deep and sleep sound enough after it.

Lady L. You must first get taken into the General's service; all depends on that. Watch the Chaplain's signal. Here he comes. (*Enter Chaplain.*) I hear the bugle blown again, the worst will soon be over. (*Andrew places writing materials on table, L. Lady Laura and Chaplain range, R. H. Retainers enter and range at back, and R. C. Enter Jackson, Maurice, Pike, Killjoy, and troopers.*)

Maur. Madam, I have explained concerning the treaty to my father, who is pleased to grant it on condition that we search the castle first, high and low, and seize whatsoever and whomsoever we may find lurking in any place of concealment. I presume you agree to this.

Jack. Hark-ye lass, thou hast fought well, and I respect courage even in a woman, and therefore I pardon thy obstinancy so far; but as thou art now entirely in my power, I counsel ye be no more stiff-necked, but obedient to my words. Moreover, the heart of my son, Maurice, inclineth favourably unto thee, therefore if thou consentest to be his wife, I grant all these thy conditions without much ado, and we will sign the treaty at once—say, girl, art willing?

Kill. What! brother Nathaniel, would'st marry thy son to a daughter of Belial? Know ye not she is a very witch. (*Aside.*) If this match take place I am a ruined man. (*Sneeringly to Lady Laura.*) I give you joy, Mistress Neville, of so great an honour as to be the wife of Captain Maurice Jackson, verily a godly youth, and comely withal, instead of wedding that profane, swash-buckling, devil-may-care, malignant, Lord Eustace.

Jack. Hold thy peace! brother Uriah, I'll not be dictated to in this

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matter by you or any man ; the estate of marriage is an honourable estate, and the damsel is well favoured, and likely enough to do credit to our house ; hold up thy head and speak for thyself, girl.

Lady L. (*Sarcastically*). Fear not, Master Killjoy, that I shall avail myself of so great an honour. (*To General*). I thank you, sir, most heartily for your proposal, but I could not consent to wed your son were it to save my life, being long since contracted in marriage to a noble cavalier now in exile, and whom, perhaps, I may never see again, in this world. (*Sighs*). But I am willing to agree to the search and any other reasonable terms, so I be free at last.

Jack. (*In rage, striking fist on table*). Zounds ! and destruction, girl ! art mad to brave my anger thus ? Dost dare refuse my son ? then take the consequence, and be hanged to thee. What, ho ! my Ironsides ! ye children of promise ! advance and spoil these Egyptians, bind the men fast and guard them, break open their coffers, defile their choice resting-places. Slay all their cattle, spare not for their crying. Verily they shall see what it is to provoke my wrath ! Away ! search from garret to cellar, and hold fast what ye find. Friend Pike, lead the way. (*Exeunt Jackson and Pike with four troopers. Chaplain, Andrew, Humphrey, and retainers are bound by soldiers. Laura remains seated in her chair—Maurice by her side. Margery and Patience weeping. The troopers empty large chest of plate, jewels, and other valuables. Others drink and laugh at their prisoners. Maurice endeavours to stay the license of the troopers, and protects Lady Laura.*

Chap. What hast thou done, child ? I fear me all is lost. How canst thou not seem to sacrifice thyself for thy father's house ?

Lady L. Would'st have me forswear myself, old friend ? Nay, but I have still a remedy. (*Touches ring*).

Maur. Fear not, sweet lady. I crave thy pardon for my father's hasty suit. I will guard thee from all danger with my life. Thou knowest him not. Anon his rage will pass, and he will sign the treaty ; but I trust thou wilt believe I never dared aspire to such high bliss as thy dear love, and yet count me ever a true friend.

Killjoy. (*Coming down with Margery*). Pray thee show if thou hast aught that will refresh the outer man ; yea, and there cometh up even here a sweet smelling savour, which is pleasant to the nostrils. I will even bear thee company on this errand.

Marg. Follow me, gentlemen, and I will soon bring ye to a repast. Oh! if his worship, the General, would but take me into his service. I know what I know. (*Significantly*). (*Enter Jackson, Pike, and others*).

Jack. (*Showing Charter*). Behold the spoil of the Amalekites—now are we victors indeed! Their magic paper is ours; their spells are broken; their enchantments no longer prevail! Look on this, proud woman! and tremble for thy fate—thy secrets are at last discovered.

Lady L. Alas! alas! it is the Royal Charter! (*To Chaplain*). My friend, we are undone!

Chap. This is the heaviest blow of all; but how did they discover it? The secret was known but to ourselves and to Sir Ralph Neville.

Pike. Thou'rt wrong, 'twas known to me and Sir Lionel de Vere; he saw his niece and you one day surveying it, and told us where to look.

Maur. Found ye aught else? Where is the young man whom ye sought?

Jack. He is escaped as a bird out of the snare.

Marg. Oh! if your worship would but listen to the voice of counsel. I could tell ye of many and many such hiding places where treason lies buried. I do most humbly repent me, even in sackcloth and ashes, for having served in a malignant family so long. I have been converted miraculously by worshipful master Killjoy's preachings, and I and my poor husband desire nothing better than to serve your worship on our bended knees all the days of our life. (*Courtseying low to him*).

Jack. A marvellous conversion truly. Be it so, dame. (*Aside*). Ye may serve our purpose for a time, but if I catch ye tripping, ye shall swing for it.

Lady L. Margery, Andrew, what means this vile desertion?

Marg. Verily, Laura Neville, the scales have fallen from my eyes, and I now see plainly—(*aside*)—which side my bread is buttered.

Hum. And if I might be so bold, your honour, I can shoot as straight as most men, and know every inch of ground about the place.

Jack. What, thou too, young jackanapes? 'tis passing strange, but we'll e'en try your mettle. (*Aside*). Zounds! they are like enough to betray me too; however, there's no cure for treachery like fear. (*To Laura*). But to conclude this matter—hearken, girl, thou must either consent to wed my son without delay, or renounce all pretension and title to this castle and estate, as

it is set forth in this learned document; and swear on the Bible never to enter or lay claim to it again, openly or secretly, by force or fraud, now, henceforth, and for ever. On this condition I grant thee and thy followers leave to depart in peace, wheresoever ye will, by to-morrow's dawn, and take with thee some of thy treasures. If thou refuse this grace, then will I deal with thee after the usual custom of war. Now choose.

Lady L. (Pointing to Chaplain). I have chosen. Set but this good man free, and I abjure the rest.*

Jack. Draw up this fresh article of the treaty in due form. (*Pike goes to table and writes*).

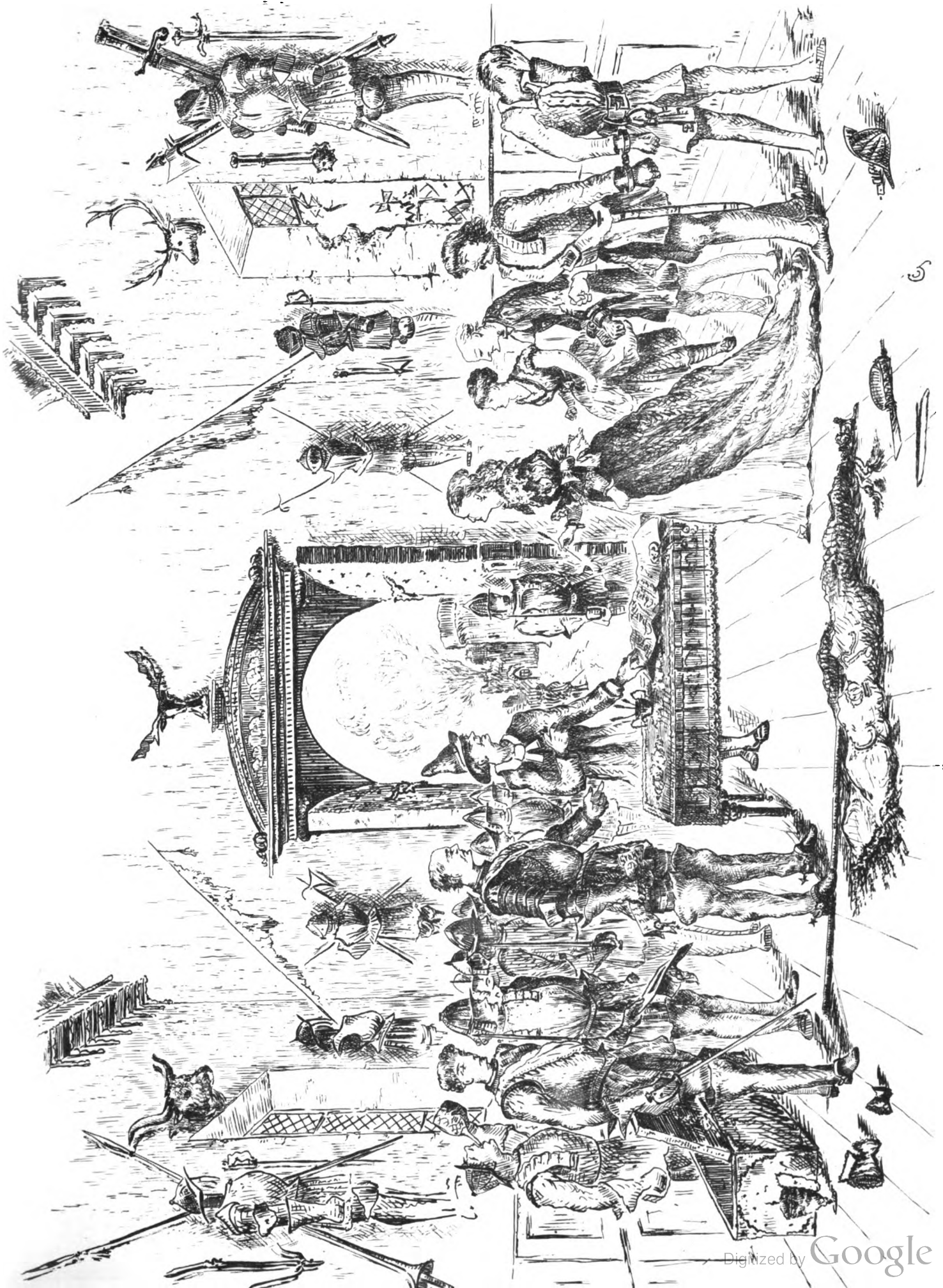
Lady L. I never thought to sign away my birthright thus. Great Heaven, do thou protect the fatherless! But how shall I take leave of all I love? (*To retainers*). Come hither, my old friends, and look your last upon your master's daughter; for your sakes have I forsworn my ancient heritage, and wander forth a vagrant to strange lands—perchance to beg my daily bread. Yet murmur not, for Heaven most surely will accept the sacrifice, and grant its blessing. I thank ye all for the courage and fidelity ye have displayed during the siege, and charge ye all still to preserve your faith unto the King whate'er befall. Yet provoke not the usurper's wrath by noisy demonstrations, else shall ye render my work of none effect; but follow quietly your several callings, think of her who loved ye to the last—your prayers are all she asks; and if ever fortune smile again upon this wretched land, I know there will not lack stout hearts and willing hands to aid the cause. (*Tearfully*). And must I leave the hearth which gladdened all my childhood? now barren, desolate, wasted with fire and sword. Farewell! old home and all ye familiar faces. More would I speak but tears have choked my utterance. God bless ye all until we meet again.

Jack. Now to clench our bargain; this done we will withdraw a little space, and leave the place in trust of these good folks and my son Maurice. (*Lady Laura signs*).

Lady L. See, now 'tis done! and would the hand might wither that ere subscribed such treason!

Jack. Ye are all witnesses to this deed, and Ravenstone is mine henceforth. (*Killjoy and Pike sign*).

* You see she very cleverly avoids taking a regular Bible oath even to save her conscience in future.



"Signing The Treaty."

Lady L. (C.) (Violently agitated, and raising her hand towards him).
 It is; and with it take my curse. Mayest thou never know sleep under this roof; may thy days be sad and lonely—thy nights full of fear and trembling; may the wine thou drinkest out of these flagons turn to gall and bitterness; may thy sleep be haunted by the faces of thy victims, and their cries and lamentations ring in thine ears; may the guilt of this deed rest upon thy soul and blacken it for ever. *(Jackson and soldiers stand terror-struck. Retainers kneel by Lady Laura, who stands with hands uplifted, C of stage, Chaplain L. C., appealing to Laura. Act drop descends quickly).*

END OF ACT III.

ACT FOURTH.

THE OMEN FULFILLED.

Time.—Commences immediately after Act III.—Autumn of 1651—Lapse of nine years (nearly) between 2nd Mud Scene in Forest and the one in the Abbey Ruins by Moonlight, which takes place in the end of May, 1660, just before the Restoration.

SCENE I.—A Library at Colonel Pride's—Table and two Chairs discovered, C.—Scene in 2nd Grooves if possible—Lady Eleanor Pride and Laura discovered.

Lady E. Right welcome art thou, sweet coz., to this grim mansion. I bless the chance of war that sent thee hither to cheer my solitude. Say, Laura, didst thou ever see such a dismal prison?

Lady L. Nay, Nelly, 'tis not so bad after all; but methinks your husband must be a very studious man, for, by my troth, I never saw so many learned books before out of a College.

Lady E. (*With disgust*). Aye, Laura, he's a book-worm with a vengeance; nothing but books from morning till night, except when he is fighting, scolding, swearing, eating, drinking, or asleep, till I loathe the very sight of them; he sits poring over them by the hour together, and I am left alone to amuse myself as best I may. Such books, too, the lightest of them Master John Milton's new poem, or a brand snatched from the burning; he offered to read to me once, and I fell asleep during the process. But say, coz., what shall we do to while away the time?

Lady L. Oh! never fear for that! Where are your lute and virginals?

Lady E. (*Sarcastically*). Thou dost mock me surely. Why, dost thou not know that lute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music are strictly forbidden by the council of the elect, as frivolous, ungodly pastimes, ministering to pride and vain glory? No, the only thing allowable is to sing psalms through your nose with a fine drawling whine, and as I can't accomplish that feat, and would not if I could, I am content to hold my tongue. Know that instead of Lady Eleanor I am now Dame Pride, madam, or mistress, worthy spouse, and so forth. Look what a fright I am (*pointing to her dress*); didst ever see such gear? Instead of silks and lace, this odious stuff and lawn;

instead of my pomander ball, a bunch of keys (*swings her chatelaine*), scissors, and thimble ; instead of hunting, hawking, singing, dancing, and the like, my pastime is to spin, knit, sew, bake, brew, and so forth, study the cookery book, and with these hands sometimes prepare savoury dishes to tickle my husband's palate. I long to poison him at times, the wretch !

Lady L. You amaze me ; but never mind, we'll make ourselves merry nevertheless. If to-morrow be fine, we'll go a good long ride, and take our hawks. I want to see something of this country.

Lady E. Worse and worse ; you little know the hardness of my lot. I have no second horse to lend you, and never dare go abroad unless attended by my master, and as for hawk and hound, there's no such thing about the place. I used to think it dull enough at home with you, but that was gay compared with this. I loathe my very life, but more the tyrant who doth set me these hard tasks. One thing of late I've learned, the art of making a strange new drink called tea ; 'tis an herb right pleasant to the taste when mixed with boiling water, and good for curing headache and spleen, and such like ills ; but 'tis exceeding dear, from fifty to a hundred shillings the pound weight, and only to be had of one Garraway, an Eastern merchant in the Strand ; 'tis somewhat of a mystery, too, my spouse doth much affect it : we'll have some by-and-bye.

Lady L. With all my heart.

Lady E. But, after all, how sad a fate is mine. I've had to give up all my pastimes, jewels, and sports, for one mad moment's whim. Oh ! what a fool was I ! Had I but known what fate had in store for me, it would not have been thus. I sit, think, and dream on all the past, till my soul longs to peer into the future. Sometimes, methinks, I can almost read my doom, and long !—Oh ! how I long !—for those old times. Ah ! me, unhappy ! I've sold myself to a base tyrant, and all for what ? to punish him who never did me wrong, but loving me too well. Oh ! Laura, Laura ! if thou hast any pity, tell me of him. I read a whole sad story in thy looks. Nay, but thou shalt speak.

Lady L. Alas ! poor Walter !

Lady E. Poor Walter ! Why so ! Poor enough, I trow, to waste the treasures of his heart on one who gave him no return. Yes, he was bankrupted in love. But what else meanest thou ? Speak, Laura, if ere thou lovest me (*nervously*). What tidings of him ? Nay, tell me all the worst ;

'twere mercy to the fever that consumes my brain in agony of doubt. Take pity on me. (*Kneels to Laura*).

Lady L. (*Raising her gently*). Another time, dear Nelly; I dare not now. Remember, you are married. It were not well to make your husband jealous. (*Eleanor turns to her impatiently*). All wouldst thou know? Then muster all thy courage, for 'tis ill news. Sir Walter is no more. He died a hero's death on Worcester field, and poured out his noble blood ungrudgingly to save the Crown; but all, alas, in vain—his enemies triumphed. He could not live without thee, and bade me tell thee he forgave all, and died thy true love. Oh! Nelly, Nelly! why didst thou force this from me?

(*A long pause, during which either Lady Eleanor faints and is recovered by her cousin, or sits staring dumbly and stupefied before her for several minutes, and then all at once bursts into hysterical laughter*).

Lady E. Dead! Dead for love of me! Aye, truly, Walter, thou hast thy revenge; thou saidst, "on this side the grave we ne'er should meet again." Hist! here he comes! Do you not see his breast covered with wounds? and from his side trickles a gory stream; his locks are all bedaubed with blood. Art come to claim thy bonnie bride, my Lord? We'll take one kiss to seal our love (*goes as if to kiss him*). What, so cold! She's ready—aye, she's ready to follow thee to the end of the world, and make our grave together (*tearing her hair wildly*).

Lady L. My God! What have I done? She's mad! Oh! send her tears to quench this frenzy. Here! Barbara, all of you! Help!! (*Strikes bell on table*).

Enter Barbara and Chaplain.

Chap. Good Heaven! What's this I see?

Bar. My mistress is gone crazed, thanks to your sorceries, madam, but you shall pay the penalty, I promise you. (*Goes to Eleanor*). Do you not know me, madam? I am your own faithful servant Barbara.

Eleanor. (*Fiercely*). The girl who stole my sweetheart! Wretch! I'll strangle thee. (*Rushes at Barbara, who eludes her*).

Chap. My child, how hath this happened?

Lady L. Oh! wretched woman that I am! Would I could give my life for her's! We were holding discourse on our past lives, and I tried to reconcile her to her present lot, when suddenly she asked me what news of Sir Walter. I tried to evade the question, but she forced the truth from me;

and lo! here is the result. Of course I may *not* be believed, and that girl and Colonel Pride may accuse me of witchcraft.

Chap. This is a sad strait, but I will see what I can do with her. (*Approaches Eleanor*). At your service, madam; I heard you wanted to speak with me.

Lady E. (*Gazing at him vacantly*). So you're the priest who is to wed us! We stay but for Sir Walter; doubt not he'll pay thee richly for keeping our secret. (*Turns to Laura*). And her most gracious Majesty the Queen has consented to honour our nuptials with her presence. Madam, I kiss your hands in gratitude. (*Turns to Laura with courtesy*).

Enter Colonel Pride.

Bar. (*To Pride*). Behold the spell at work! I say, sir, that your wife is most foully bewitched by her cousin, Lady Laura Neville, and her *familiar*, the so-called Chaplain. She is completely in their power; observe her mien.

Col. P. Hush! girl, or thou'lt drive me mad, too. I'll approach her, and judge for myself. (*Cross to her, R. H.*)

Lady E. (*Turns slowly round, observes, rushes at him like a tigress*). Here comes the bridegroom. Ha! hast thou slain him, villain? Thus then I scorn and spit at thee, thou vile murderer. Give me back my true love, or die.

Col. P. (*Kneeling before she seizes him*). Madam, what means this outrage?

Lady E. It means that I am mad, and thou a traitor that has murdered my once affianced husband, and bought me for thy slave with base-coined falsehoods—it means that his blood cries to me from the very ground, that his body lies unburied on the field, and that his unquiet spirit doth walk the earth, and haunts me (*points as at Sir Walter*) till he be avenged on thee. See him but now! Never fear, Sir Walter, thou shalt have justice yet, and Christian burial. Eleanor de Vere hath sworn it—yea, though her soul should pay the penalty. How the coward trembles! (*Laughs*).

Col. P. Alas! too true my hand hath slain her lover, but 'twas only on the field of battle, and in fair fighting—let who will deny it. Or hath she really seen his ghost? I've heard of such like apparitions, and the dread sight hath thus disturbed her brain. Barbara, take thy mistress in: send for the leech; let her be closely watched. (*Barbara crosses to her*).

Lady L. (*Comes forward*). Behold the unwilling author of this woe.

I told my cousin, after much compulsion, of Sir Walter's death. I never named his slayer, nor dreamt the news would thus affect her reason; but let me share her doom; I can at least tend her through her illness. Oh! let me stay with her.

Col. P. Woman, avaunt! Away from me, I say, if thou wouldst escape with life! My soul abhors the very sight of thee. Look on the wreck thou hast made, and triumph o'er it. I loved my wife after my fashion. I, whom men call hard and stern, had one soft spot for her—yea, though I be a Round-head and a Puritan. I might have won her love in time but for thy meddling, a fit return truly for shelter from thy foes in hour of need. Hence! begone! Out of my sight, I say, or I will have thee clapped into prison straight on charge of witchcraft, and thou know'st well enough what that means now-a-days.

Bar. (Savagely). Oh! do, master; 'tis only what she deserves.

Lady L. My heart will surely break. Nay, then, I go, but I must say farewell to her. (*Crosses to Eleanor*). Sweet cousin, forgive me for the sorrow I have caused thee. May Heaven send thee tender nurses, and restore thy reason; but if e'er thou lackest a friend, think on thy cousin Laura, and send for her. Adieu, dear playmate of old happy days: one kiss—nay, not one glance of recognition in those dear eyes, so late full of bright thoughts? (*Kisses her*). Once more, farewell! My burden truly is greater than I can bear. Heaven help me! (*Barbara and servant lead off Eleanor*).

Pride. (Aside, as Laura crosses to L., shaking his fist at her). If I dared but break my oath of safe conduct to her; but no, she must depart. (*To Laura*). Take thou my curse along with thee, thou foul-plotting witch! Go, get thee gone, and never more be seen, or thou shalt burn for it.

Chap. Come, my poor child, let us depart at once, and seek shelter 'neath the Dome of Heaven, who judges not as man; He will maintain the cause of innocence, and guide thee safely to thy father's arms. Come, wrap thy mantle round thee, for 'tis chill; and away for the fair shores of France. (*Shows paper*). This will be our safeguard thither; come, tremble not, but away at once. (*Throws mantle round her, and exeunt L. 1 E.*)

Col. P. Traitor! I'll dog thy steps, and e'en yet be avenged on thee. (*Exit L. 1 E.*)

END OF SCENE I.

SCENE II.*—*The Forest—Distant view through trees of Morass—Cut Woods, R. and L., 2nd Grooves—Half-cut Wood, L. in 1st Groove—Humphrey's hut, R. 2 E.—Cave, L. U. E.—an old Stone Cross on 2 steps on trap C.—This must sink at change of Scene. When the final adventure with Will-o-the-wisp takes place, as General Jackson and his crew would never begin a search for fugitives towards evening, it must therefore begin with just before dawn of 2nd day, or in the evening after sunset if it only occupies one day and night.*

Enter Chaplain and Lady Laura, R. H.

Lady L. We must be near the mouth of the cave, good friend; methinks yonder is Humphrey's hut. Thank Heaven! for I am weary. Oh! should we be discovered!

Chap. Thou art right, my child, it is so; yet we must be cautious how we seek admittance at this late hour. 'Tis past midnight, so far the stars have guided us on well upon our journey: but the blast grows cold. Do thou remain here a short space while I go and reconnoitre. (*Goes up stage—Laura sits at foot of cross or old tree.*)

Humphrey enters from hut, R. H.

Hum. I thought I heard voices just now. Hullo! what's that? (*Looks round.*) A man lurking in the shade. I'll hail him. How now, master; what do you want? I can't have any poachers here, so you had best be off, before I get my gun.

Chap. (*Advancing.*) Young man, I am no poacher, but a distressed traveller, seeking shelter for one night for myself and a young woman, my daughter.

Hum. (*Looking in his face.*) What, sir! Do I see the Reverend Joseph Lane, formerly Chaplain of Ravenstone, or is it a ghost?

Chap. It is I myself, Humphrey. Never fear, lad, you must use the utmost speed and caution, for I have your lady with me, and she is half dead with cold and terror. Let us in at once, and we will tell you all our misadventures.

Hum. Oh, Heaven! What mischance has brought you back here?

* AUTHOR'S NOTE.—This scene has been very much curtailed, and I fear it will now play too quickly to admit of change of lights, as it should occupy first one night, then day, then a second night, showing a house in the distance, a sunset, twilight, and night again.

But I am right glad to see you anyhow, and you shall have the best my poor hut can offer. Welcome! a thousand times, honoured mistress; 'tis but a poor place, but such as it is, you are right welcome to it. There is a little chamber within where my lady can sleep, if she will but put up with it till we think of some safe place.

Lady L. Say no more of apology, good Humphrey; we are your debtors greatly. The hunted hart is thankful for the meanest covert, nor quarrels with the prickles of the gorse—so I for any place to lay my weary head this night. 'Tis not the worth, but freedom of the gift enriches it; and this poor hut, thus freely open to us, is a princely refuge: but do we not bring heavy risk to you, my trusy friend?

Hum. Lady, I'll not deny it, but we must think how to deceive yon wolf, and put him on the wrong track. Come in at once and rest, and warm yourselves by the fire; you shiver still. (*Exeunt all into hut—Andrew enters L. U. E. as they go off, crosses and knocks at door.*)

And. Humphrey, son Humphrey, art stirring yet man?

Enter Humphrey from hut.

Hum. Aye, father, here I am; what news bring you?

And. Ill news enough, and foul play, I fear me. Yon old scoundrel, whom we call master, hath this very morning received orders from the Lord-Protector and Council to search all the domain and surrounding district, even to the uttermost verge of the county, to see if there be any malignants lurking in concealment here about: and if they find any such, whether old or young, man or woman, gentle or simple, God help them! poor souls, if they are to be delivered up to the Parliament, for they give short shrift enough now-a-days. But what's the matter? Thou lookest scared. Hast seen any whom this may concern?

Hum. Marry, father! that have I, but whist! for fear of eaves-droppers. (*Speaks low to him.*) Who do you think I've got inside the hut now? Our dear mistress and the Chaplain. They are wandering on towards the coast, but took shelter with me for one night. We must manage to conceal them from the General, for if he gets scent of their track, its all up with them, poor souls! I'll just warn them of this new danger, and my lady must hide in the vaulted passage and the Abbey ruins, where, if she is seen, 'twill be thought 'tis only the ghost of Lady Maude haunting the place. I will soon hasten to the Castle, and attend my master. (*Exit Humphrey.*)

And. Good Lord, preserve them in this strait! Oh! for one peep of my lady's bonnie face! Yet I must return home, or the General will suspect something. Softly, Andrew! Why, the old wife will be most out of her wits with joy! But I'll not tell her yet. No, no! Women can never keep a secret, for the best of them are but sieves, and if known, 'twould spoil all. I'll not say a word till we've thought of some plan for their escape. We must dissemble and look unconcerned—there, so (*assuming look of comic importance*) not pleased, or over anxious, but just so (*looking very knowing*). There! I defy even a conjuror to tell I had a secret. No, no! Marry, old girl! I know a game worth two of that. (*Exit, chuckling*).

Enter Humphrey, Jackson, Pike, Killjoy, and Maurice, L. U. E.

Maur. There is scarce need to look farther in this direction. How think you, sir?

Hum. May it please your worship to step into my hut.

Pike. Think you, General, the malignants may have shelter here?

Hum. If it please your worship to search my poor hut, 'tis free to you. (*Opens door*). This way, my masters.

Jack. Friend Pike, go thou and search the dwelling of this knave from top to bottom. (*Exit Pike*). Son Maurice, thou knowest the proverb, safe bind, safe find; who knows but that he may be a traitor after all, and have dealings with the sons of Belial. (*Enter Pike*). Well, what hast thou found?

Pike. Truly nothing but a heap of rabbit skins, an old fowling-piece, a most potent smell of a savoury pottage and tobacco.

Jack. Marry! but methinks thou art an honest man after all; but come! help us to track these malignants to their lair. One hundred crowns to the man who findeth these Amalekites.

Kill. I'll earn it, General, if any do.

Hum. (*Aside*). You scoundrel! I'll lead them such a dance that their legs will ache, I'll warrant them, before they get home again. This way, gentlemen, and I would counsel you to proceed in the direction of the light yonder, gleaming from Squire Gifford's house; for I hear, on good authority, 'tis a signal he nightly displays to all truant cavaliers, and ye are likely enough to meet there the company ye desire.

Maur. I will go round by the Devil's Bridge, so as to cut them off from all chance of escape. But up, search both sides; if ye need our help ye have but to holloa for us; if we hear nothing in half an hour, we shall go

home by the market town. But I advise your worship not to tarry too long, for they do say the witches of Godhurst hold their nightly meetings hard by.

Jack. Go to now, sirrah, off with you ; go, do as ye have said. Think'st thou that I, Nathaniel Jackson, the Lord's anointed one, am to be frightened by a parcel of old women's tales? (*Exit Humphrey and Maurice*). See! yonder is the evening star, and I can descry Charles's wain above us. By my troth! a goodly omen. (*Jackson, Pike, and Killjoy are going to L. U. E. when Jackson sees Eleanor coming*). Stop where ye are, men. Hist! what's that?

Pike. (*Crouching behind tree*). Good Lord, deliver us! A ghost! a witch!

Enter Lady Eleanor, dressed in old dress of the same colour as that worn by her in 2nd Act, her hair down, and whole appearance giving the idea of madness. She has wild flowers and ivy in her hands. Barbara follows at a distance.

Lady E. (*Searching on ground*). Not yet! not yet! I cannot find it. Yet it should be here. (*Looks round*). This is the battle-field where he lies weltering in his gore, and I have sworn to bury him with my own hands, and make our grave together. Oh! Walter, Walter! where art thou? My love! my love! Last night he came to me again and showed me the very spot. 'Tis strange! He said we ne'er should meet in life again. Beyond, who knows? (*Weeps*).

Bar. (*Approaching*). Madame, the night grows chill; I pray you be advised to wrap this mantle round you.

Lady E. (*Fiercely*). Go to, girl! I'll none of it. Return, sayest thou? Aye, aye, to be beaten, chained, and starved! No! no! I love my liberty too well. See how my wings have grown! Such beautiful wings! (*Spreads her scarf out as wings*). Wings to bear me to my love. I'm off, over the sea. Farewell! (*Cross stage to R. Jackson comes down to R. 1 E.*)

Jack. Stop! Whom have we here?

Bar. Oh! sir, whoever you may be, I pray you don't hurt my lady. (*Aside, whispering to him*). She is mad, poor thing—as mad as a March hare. (*Aloud*). Know you not 'tis Mistress Pride, the wife of Colonel Pride, formerly the Lady Eleanor de Vere. I pray you now, as a staunch friend of the Parliament, let us pass unquestioned.

Jack. So, so! the wrong bird. Well, my pretty one! I meant no harm. Poor thing, I've heard her story. But how cometh she abroad at this hour?

Bar. Sir, my lady oft doth fancy to take a moonlight ramble.

Lady E. (To Jackson). I pray you tell me have you seen my love? He's coming to marry me to-day, and this is for our bridal. (*Shows wreath of wild flowers*).

Jack. No, madam, but I *may* see him. I pray you tell me what he is like.

Lady E. The most noble, handsome, and brave warrior that the world ever saw—in a word, Walter de Lacy; but he is gone just now to visit the man in the moon, and I'm to dig his grave ere he returns. (*Sings ballad here as arranged for piece, and during it decorates Maude's cross with flowers*).

Jack. The game I seek is far different. I'm searching the country to see if any cavaliers be lurking in these parts, more especially that old scoundrel they call the Chaplain of Ravenstone, and that arch traitress, Laura Neville.

Bar. Oh! sir, if that's your errand, God speed you! Good luck! Why, that was she who bewitched my poor mistress so cruelly, and then escaped in the night. They were here not a week ago, and can't be far off. I reckon you are as like to hear of them up at Master Gifford's, on the hill, as anywhere.

Lady E. (*Turning from cross to Jackson*). Who are you, sirrah! who durst question me?

Jack. I am General Jackson, master of Ravenstone Castle and Abbey.

Lady E. You mean the man who *stole* it from my cousin. Hast seen the Lady Maude yet?—she who was built up in the Abbey walls for refusing to wed her lover's murderer, and walks the night to guard the Nevilles. This is her cross. She will be here anon to tell her beads. Who sees her at her prayers, and has ever harmed one of that family, will ne'er live to see another dawn. So beware! old fox. Ha! ha! I must away; my bonnie bridegroom calls for me. I'm coming. I'm coming, my lord. (*Turns to Barbara*). Your Majesty and the Court, I see, are assembled. My hand for a caranto, did you say, sir? Nay, then, I cannot refuse, and we will e'en tread the measure together for old acquaintance's sake. (*Gives her hand to Barbara, and exit, singing and dancing*).

Jack. (*Looking after her*). Poor soul, she's sadly crazed. But doubtless 'tis through her frequenting this spot that it comes to be called the haunt of the witches.

Kill. Verily! one mad woman is enough at a time; besides, she

promised us the ghost in half an hour. 'Twere better we were moving: the night blows chill. (*His teeth chatter visibly*).

Here the Will-o'-the-wisp begins to shine out and dance about, misleading them till end of scene, when it blazes up and shows his struggles at end of stage.

Jack. What! does thy heart fail thee already, man? Is not the goodness of our cause enough to ensure our safety? Verily, friend Killjoy, thou hast but a calf's liver. Friend Pike, go thou and search yonder cave. I will try this rocky path. Master Killjoy, do thou scan yonder thicket, but be cautious if thou lightest on any human being. Conceal thyself behind a tree, and remember our signal; we shall be within easy call of one another. Remember, too, we have a strong cord to bind the knaves fast withal. (*Re-enter Pike as they go up stage*). Friend Pike, hast seen aught?

Pike. Nothing, General, but bats and owls, and such like vermin.

Kill. I can descry nothing but trees, and frogs, and stones. Don't you think we had better give up the search?

Jack. (*Looking off L.*) There's a light moving in this direction. Look out, Master Killjoy, and report to us. (*Exit Killjoy, cautiously*). Now, friend Pike, stand close, for 'tis some one coming this way.

Kill. (*Speaks outside*). Help! help! Here, good friends, the pitfall of destruction has opened her mouth, and I'm sinking! Oh! save me! save me!

Jack. Why, verily, it is a bog, and the Will-o'-the-wisp hath led him to destruction. Quick, man, take the pole, or he is lost.

Kill. (*Without*). I'm a dead man! I'm a dead man! sure enough. (*Exeunt, laughing*).

(An interval of nine years must unavoidably elapse between this scene and the next in the Abbey ruins, according to present form of the Play).

Here the scene for the Abbey ruins must be very carefully shifted, and the forest scene closed in entirely, or the green curtain allowed to drop for about ten minutes, perhaps less, during which suitable music plays continuously, and re-opens to ghost melody.

END OF SCENE II.

LOVE'S MAGIC.

SCENE III.—*Abbey Ruins—Set Cloisters, Towers, Large Arch at R. H., with pedestal for Lady Laura to be discovered standing in a niche with steps at side, that she may come down easily—Steps to be masked by ruined stone-work—Ivy round pillars—Lime light to gradually fall on figure, and be full on at end of Maurice's speech.*

Enter (R.) Pike and Killjoy, treading cautiously.

Pike. Now will we test the truth of all old Margery's tales. I do protest I much misdoubt her legend, and think that she hath cozened us thus far—played upon our fears—yet 'tis a likely place enough, and a most fitting season. How dost thou feel, friend Killjoy?

Kill. Gossip, I like not our errand. I must confess my knees do tremble, and my blood runs cold, as it hath often done, at the recital of such like tales on winter nights by yonder beldame. Methinks it doth savour much of presumption, for remember there be verily ghosts in Scripture; and this apparition is ever fatal to its enemies. If it appear not soon I will retire and count it but an idle tale (*uneasily*).

Pike. Nay, man, thou shalt not stir till we are satisfied, now thou art here. (*Grasps his arm, and holds him fast*). 'Tis just the hour! Hist!! See yonder! It is (*points in awe to niche where the moon has just discovered Lady Laura, who paces cloisters, telling her beads, and crossing herself in dumb show*) true, then, after all. How fearful! yet how beautiful! It looks like marble. See! Now it moves and beckons us to follow. I must, I will obey. Speak to it, man—invoke it, as thou art a pillar of the Church. What! afraid of a phantom! Canst think of no prayer or exorcism to break the spell? (*They follow it, Pike eagerly dragging Killjoy with him. The ghost leads them up to the ruined altar or screen of choir, L. C. It suddenly grows dark, and the ghost vanishes, just as Pike tries to grasp its veil. They tumble over a skull*).

Kill. Nay, then, we are lost men.

Both. 'Tis gone; 'tis then a ghost, indeed! Oh! gracious lady, pardon our rash presumption. (*They fly in terror*).

Soft music fills up the interval during this scene.

Enter Maurice.

Maur. "Tis now the magic hour when Lady Maude holds solemn vigil

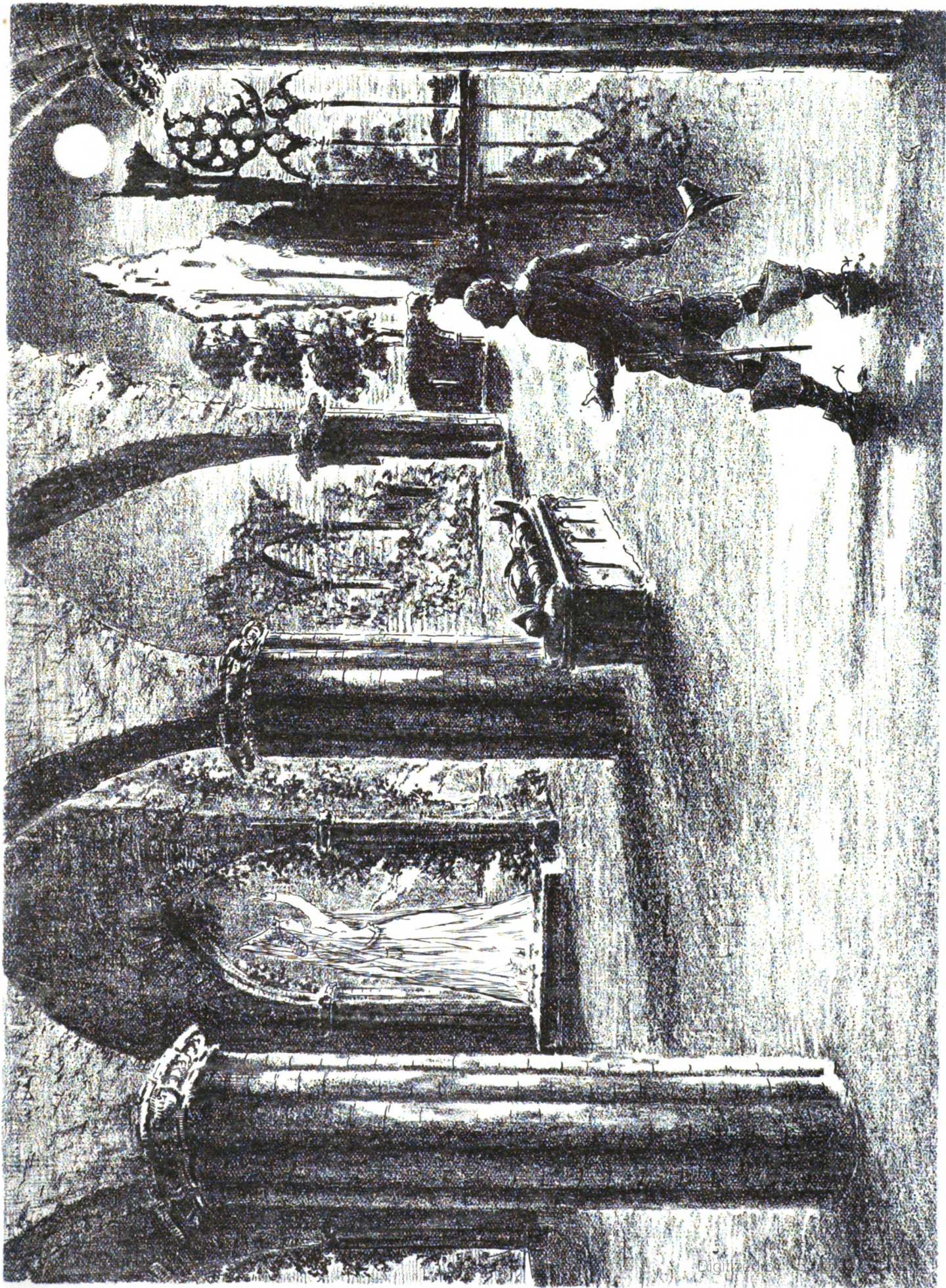
by this ruined shrine ; and I have ventured here to gaze upon one who is fatal to all our race. Oh ! sweet spirit ! gracious lady, deign but to appear unto thy humble vassal, and I will brook the worst that fate decrees, for sure I am a spectre so beneficent as thine will not confound me with all my rebel kindred. Oh ! might I but gaze once more on e'en an ancestress of her's, I would lay bare my soul unto the phantom, and seek its aid to waft a message to my own best love. Oh ! Laura ! Laura ! wert thou but in life I would profess myself thy slave in face of all the world. (*Music. Sees Laura in niche. Lime light full on her*). But soft ! She comes ! All hail, then, Lady Maude !" (*She descends from niche, and beckons him to follow, passes behind pillars, appearing and disappearing behind the ivy at intervals, till she reaches stage, L.*)

Maur. (*Speaking through business and music, and so timing it that he is ready to touch Laura as she reaches last arch to step to stage*). "What do mine eyes behold ? 'Tis she ! Her very form, her very features ! as when she walked the earth, but pale beyond compare, transformed, etherealized in death's dread crucible, which sifteth all, yea even the purest gold, leaving the dross behind ! Oh ! speak to me, thou dread enchantress ! Art sent to warn the living ? Is it a vision or a most blest reality ? (*Takes hold of Laura*). 'Tis, as I thought, warm flesh and blood, by Heaven !" (*They advance to front, he still holding her by one hand, she holding her long white veil partly over her face, and partly showing it*).

Lady L. I will no longer deceive thee, Maurice. I am no ghost, save the ghost of my former self, but a poor persecuted woman. Yet, ere I reveal myself more fully, swear that thou wilt be faithful, and ne'er betray my secret, or evil shall yet befall thee.

Maur. (*Kneeling, taking her hand*). Oh ! Laura, Laura ! my own lost love ! how canst thou doubt mine honour ? I swear before high Heaven never to betray thy secret, come what may. Thou art my queen—command me as thou wilt.

Lady L. First, then, arise ! my noble friend, and follow me afar off, as if thou still pursued'st a spectre, for if any human eye spied out this our rencontre I were utterly undone, and my last chance of safety lost ; they'd burn me in the instant for a witch. Pray God there be no other watchers lurking in this enchanted ground, for my very life lies in the preservation of this mystery, and I must haunt these ruins until dawn. Observe me well but silently ; and as thou lovest me, be cautious for my sake. When I waive



"The Omen Fulfilled."

my hand towards thee, approach the spot I indicate, and I will bring thee to a secret chamber where we can hold further discourse together of these matters.

Music.

Maur. (*As she begins to move away*). "I will obey thee unto death, sweet saint! sweet love! restored to me thus marvellously through that long lapse of years. Henceforth my fate I link to thine, my sword devote to watching o'er thy safety. Heaven grant me wisdom, as well as zeal and strong fidelity, in such a cause; and here I cast my life into the balance a feather weight, and swear never to part again till death or she do banish me from her sweet presence. Bear witness, Oh! ye stars, to this most holy vow."

Lady Laura has reached the C. of cloister, touches pillar, and door opens—beckons to him, and he exits. Change scene.

In this scene the original ghost melody is by the authoress, and used when played on stage only.

END OF SCENE III.

SCENE IV.—*The Abbey Vaults, 1st Grooves—Dark heavy arches, painted to represent a great extent. Door L. flat.*

Enter Chaplain.

Chap. The moon gone down, and she has not returned! Footsteps! 'Tis she. (*Opening door, starts back, seeing Maurice with Laura*). How now, my child—a man! Then art thou undone (*pointing pistol to Maurice*).

Maur. Say not so, Reverend Sir; she is as safe as with a body-guard.

Chap. How, a friend, and in that guise? Swear then on that, not to betray our secret hiding place (*holds book to him*).

Maur. (*Kissing it*). I swear!

Lady L. At last kind fate has sent me a friend in need: and, father, shall we frown on him?

Chap. We must be wary, my child. I fear me 'tis a snare laid by that villain Jackson. Sir, the fair lady by your side is greatly wearied by her moonlight ramble, and craveth some repose.

Maur. I, sir, do but wait her ladyship's commands.

Lady L. Nay, go not yet, until at least I have explained this mystery, and do thou pardon the over-caution of my ancient friend. "True hearts need no interpreters between, but pierce at once through all disguise into each other's core." The ring of the true metal cannot be counterfeited. "As burning glass reflects the solar beams, and flint strikes fire on steel, so look we into each other's souls, and thus clasp hands." (*Maurice takes her hand*).

Chap. Nay, then, this passes all: she seems full well assured of his fidelity. Sir, since it pleases my fair charge to bid you welcome, I do confirm it thus. (*Offers his hand*). And pray you pardon my scant courtesy at first, but constant danger breedeth sharp suspicion. It has come to this, that we have been hunted off our own land, like beasts of prey, these nine years past, a price set on our heads, yet ever and anon do we return to our old haunts, to keep watch o'er our foes, like unquiet spirits that can't be laid at rest. And here we creep and crouch, like bats and owls, and things which fear the light, and bide our time for vengeance.

Maur. I pray you, sir, explain your meaning further.

Chap. That I leave to my dear wise pupil. You shall know as much or little of our concerns as pleaseth her, since she has brought you hither.

Maur. Lady fair, I pray you tell me how I can serve you best.

Lady L. By swearing solemnly you've seen the ghost, and that 'tis an awful sight. Keep up the superstition. Confirm the fears of Pike and Killjoy, but throw a veil of mystery o'er the tale, and above all keep them from searching these precincts, or we are utterly undone.)

Maur. Lady, bethink you of the peril you are in. You must not linger here. Have you no other place of refuge? I pray you fly ere it be too late.

Lady L. Have no fear for me, good Master Maurice; if only thou be faithful and discreet, we shall escape detection. For some time past I have had secret intelligence of our King's affairs, and have good cause to hope his speedy restoration to these realms, and with him all our ancient rights and title to this place. But I have been advised by my father, still at his Court, to get back, as soon as may be, our Royal Charter, the Deed I forfeited to yours on signing the treaty. 'Tis now in the custody of Master Pike, the General's friend and gossip. I have sworn to compass this by fair means or foul, and have hit upon a plan to blind all eyes and come off safe; if thou but stand my friend 'twill be much easier. See how I trust thee! (Cross R.)

Maur. Lady, say on. Thy tongue doth make the sweetest music mine ears have heard this many a day. I will perform thy bidding, let it be what it will, so that at last thou but smile on the poor soldier who helped thee to this end, and bless him with thy hand.

Lady L. Nay, nay, that cannot be. Hast thou forgotten that I am the betrothed of Lord St. Clair? Though parted from my love these many years, my heart still beats true to him. Fie! Fie! on thee, Master Maurice, to force this from me. I do protest it hath put me to the blush. I am sorry for it, and think you might have spared me this avowal.

Maur. What have I done? Madam, I had forgotten your troth plight to my lord; or rather, seeing you so unprotected, surmised his death, for surely were he living he could not leave you thus so long alone without some token of his fidelity.

Lady L. (Aside). 'Tis true, I've had no tidings from him these two years past, and—but no, I will not doubt. Your pardon, Master Maurice, is granted.

Maur. Madam, I take my leave; but if at any future time you deign to impart your plans to your poor servant, you will find, I trust, that your confidence has not been misplaced. If, after all these years of patient waiting

and hope deferred, I be rejected, I'll not complain, but bear it manfully, only in the hour of thy direst need count me ever thy true friend. Now, farewell! lady.

Lady L. Oh! noble nature! kingly soul! What true devotion in self-sacrifice! And must we part thus? Oh! Maurice, my one true friend! stand by me to the last; for know thou that the malice of mine enemies hath wound a snare about my feet so subtly spread that I may well nigh fall. Know that they call me sorceress and murderess. A price is on my head since my poor cousin Nelly's death, though she, alas, poor sweet soul, fell by her own hand. They've sought the country for me far and wide, and only by Heaven's special Providence do I survive. If I were discovered, they would burn me on the instant for a witch. Though innocent of that foul deed, alas! it was my tongue struck the blow—though all unwittingly—that drove her mad, and shattered all her senses. Thou know'st the rest, how one night she stabbed her husband in his bed, then fired the mansion, and herself perished in the flames. Oh! what a load of woe lies on my weary soul! Sometimes I long to die and be at peace, and anon the thought of my poor father comes, and then I pray to live a little longer, till I've seen his face again, and cleared myself to him and one other in the world: for were I dead, I could not rest if they believed me guilty. Oh! Maurice, I do accept thy noble fealty and offer of protection, if it cost thee not too much.

Maur. Say on, sweetest and best of women, and fear nothing, while this right arm can wield a sword, or this tongue keep a secret. But how do you propose recovering the Deed?

Lady L. By going to-morrow to Master Pike's, disguised as the rich widow Tabitha Lovegold, his wealthiest client, and bent to make my will. I know that she did purpose such a visit up to last night, but she is prevented by a fit of gout. He expects her daily. This have I from Humphrey for a fact, who just encountered the village doctor coming from her house. I'll be attended by Patience, disguised as her maid Bridget, and after our affairs are discussed we'll dine together, and I'll so bamboozle the old churl with a sleeping potion in our loving cup, that I'll warrant you he'll ne'er suspect my game. Then I'll steal the Deed and come off safe.

Maur. 'Tis deftly planned, but far too perilous a venture for your ladyship, unless you will allow me to attend you.

Lady L. A thousand thanks! but that is Humphrey's part. Your

presence would only rouse suspicion, and draw your father's anger down on us.

Maur. I've thought of that, and how to compass it. Lady, let me be the scapegoat in this business, and bear the brunt of all; your safety is all-important to your father and the cause you serve. Let me be your deputy. Name but the time and place of meeting: I will be there, happen what may, to render up the Deed into your hands. What sayest thou, lady? wilt choose me for thine ambassador to the Court of Rogues?

Lady L. Thanks for thine offer. I'll sleep on it, and let thee know by mid-day my decision. Call at Humphrey's hut in the forest for thine answer. If I go not myself, do thou bring me the Deed to the Picture Gallery by 11 o'clock to-morrow night, where I will appear unto thy father as the ghost of Lady Maude. Now, farewell! and God requite thee for this fair service. (*Exit Maurice. Door in flat.*)

Enter Humphrey, R. 1 E.

Hum. Here are despatches for your ladyship, given me but now by an old Jew, as I passed through the town to sell my venison, who said he came straight from the low countries. He thrust them into my hand, and made off straight. I did not like the look of him.

Chap. Thou must not linger, Humphrey. Remember thou art our mainstay at this crisis, and must not risk discovery, or provoke thy master's anger too far.

Hum. Your reverence is right. I'm off at once. (*Exit D. F.*)

Lady L. A letter from my father. Oh! how I long to break the seal! yet tremble, why, I know not. That silken thread, that bit of wax, the only barriers between our souls. Could we but guess what fate awaits us, beneath the smooth exterior of a letter, how many would find courage thus to break the spell? Is it good news or bad? (*Reads letter No 1.*)

"BRUGES, May 5th, 1660.

"MY CHILD,—I cannot now send for thee as I would gladly do, for our King and his Court move hence to Breda the day after to-morrow, as he has received an invitation from the States General of Holland to take up his abode there for a while. Know that the wheel of fortune has again turned round, and this time in our favour. Our King is to be restored to the throne of his father at once without delay; under Providence and General Monk's good offices, we now are on our homeward march. But caution still is

needed. In a few short weeks, perhaps even days, we may be re-united; for as our mansion of Ravenstone lies on his road, betwixt Dover and London, his Majesty has promised me that grace, to tarry there one night at least. Therefore do thou instruct our faithful servants to make all ready for our arrival, and yet keep our secret from the old rebel Jackson. We shall come at midnight with a goodly force of armed men, able to conquer all obstacles, and hold our own again. I know the joy this news will bring thee,

“And rest, thy loving father,

“RALPH NEVILLE.”

And what can be this second letter, also in my father's handwriting? Let us see. (*Reads letter No. 2*).

“BRUGES, 16th May, 1660.

“MY DEAR DAUGHTER,—Would that this hand were stiff—this heart were cold in death—ere it had penned the words which now it must. I shall return alone. Know that thy former lover, Lord St. Clair, has fled with the King's cast-off mistress, Lucy Walters. We know not where as yet, but think it is to the Hague; but be it where it may, my sword shall find him out, and he shall feel a father's vengeance. Yet take comfort, my own poor child; better be a virgin all thy life than wed to such a man. As soon as I have punished this vile deed, I shall return, and we will dwell in peace together. God send us better days.

“Ever your loving father,

“RALPH NEVILLE.”

Oh! Heaven! (*Sinks weeping on Chaplain's shoulder*).

Chap. My poor child, take comfort. This must be some vile forgery. Remember how thy cousin's happiness was wrecked by just such another missive.

Lady L. Thank God for that hope! No! no! It can't be true! Oh! Eustace, my love! my life! forgive me for doubting thee for an instant. Yet 'tis my father's hand. You know he is the soul of honour. Who can have thus forged his writing? I'll go at once and seek out the truth at all hazards. I cannot rest—don't stay me.

Chap. You cannot go alone, and at this hour. Wait patiently at least till to-morrow's dawn, and we will find some plan to solve the mystery.

Lady L. Oh! weary, weary heart! to be thus forsaken in my flower of youth. To dwell alone through that long waste of years a widowed virgin!

'Tis a fate too cruel to contemplate. If he be false I will not live: I know a way. (*Takes off ring and opens it, and raises it to take poison—Chaplain stops her*).

Chap. Rash girl! what dost thou purpose? "Beware how thou presume to quench the vital spark, and rush into eternity unbidden. Our life is not our own, but His who gave it. And if we meekly bow beneath His chastening rod, we shall soon see the rainbow of mercy shining through our cloud, formed of sorrow's rain and hope's bright beam."

Lady L. Hear me, oh Heaven! If he be false, forgive him. Lay not this sin upon his soul, but let me die. Oh let me die soon, and my spirit shall watch over him and plead for his redemption. (*Stretches out her hands as if in prayer*).

Chap. Now, thou hast gone so far, wilt thou not bear up to greet thy noble father? Do but picture his anguish, should he return and find thee cold in death! "What worth were all the wealth of worlds to him without thy smile? Thou art the rich argosy laden with hope and treasures of his love. If he return and find thee but a wreck, imagine his despair. Nay, rather pluck up thy resolution to complete an enterprise so favourably begun, and all the world shall ring with praises of thy constancy and courage."

Lady L. Patience, sweet patience! we all have need of thee sometimes. (*Exit with Chaplain, R. 1 E.—Music*).

END OF SCENE IV.

L

THE USURPER'S VIGIL.

SCENE V.—*The Picture Gallery—Picture to work—Curtains over door L. flat—Lights half down.*

Enter General Jackson.

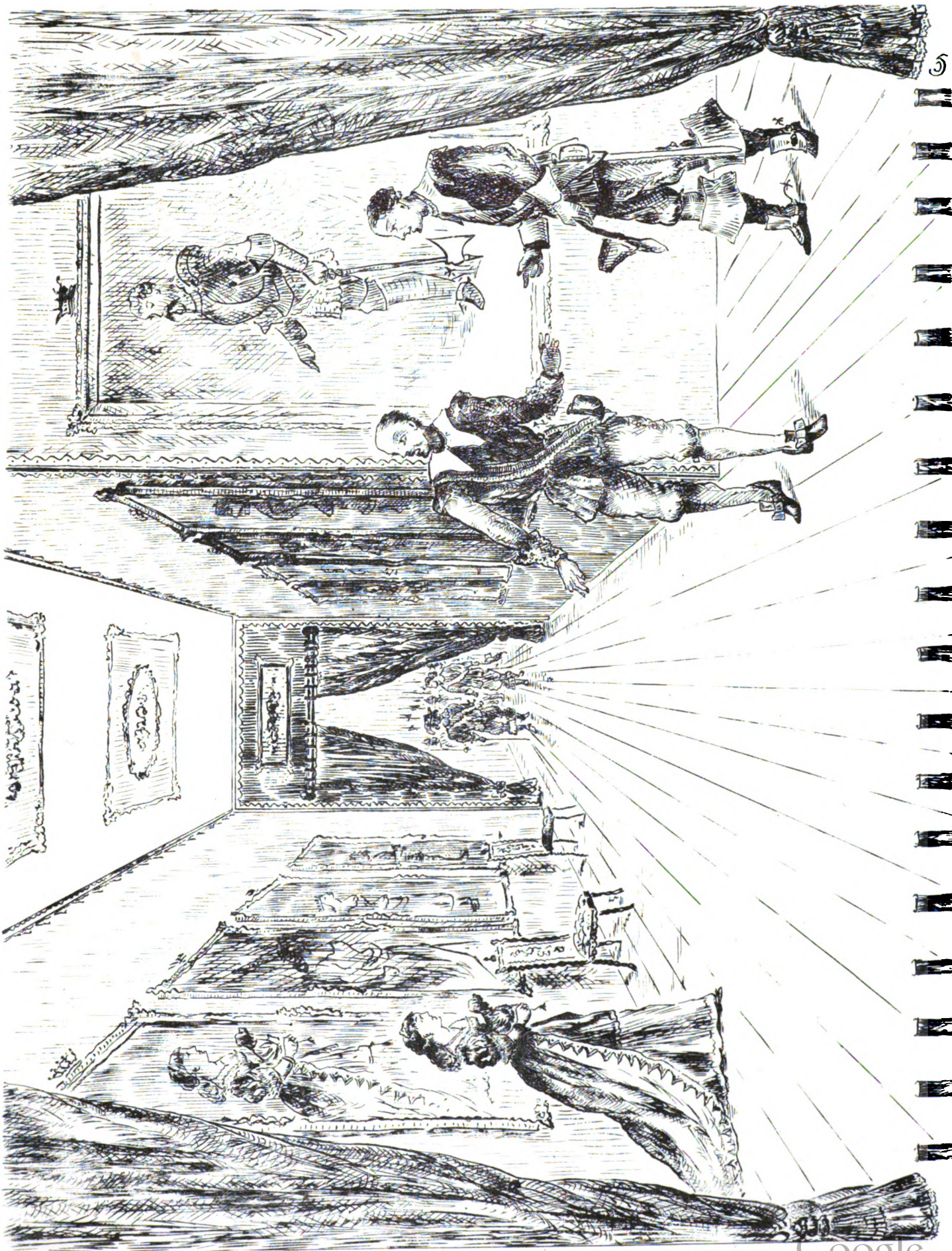
Jack. Well, time proves all. It may be but a suspicion that Charles Stuart, weary of exile, seeks again to mount the throne his father forfeited by unjust tyranny: if so, we are prepared. I hold the Deed, which gives me right and title to this place. The heir is long since dead; and more than all, I have my treacherous friend, Sir Lionel de Vere, within my grasp—he now sleeps here under my roof well guarded. I have despatched swift messengers to bring me word whether this rumour of the King's landing be true or false. I've only to state how I came by this fair heritage. The guilt lies all with him, arch plotter and unnatural kinsman—who sacrificed his brother's only child to his dark schemes and vengeful purposes. So young, so fair, so brave. But stay! What brought me hither? Oh! this same far-famed ghost of Lady Maude. I must unto the Abbey ruins. (*Lady Laura enters from picture as Lady Maude. General in turning up R. C., sees her crossing*). Stay! Has the moon yet risen? (*Turns up*). (*Laura exit at door, laughing mockingly*). 'Tis true, then. The omen is fulfilled—the mad woman's prediction is accomplished, and I stand here a doomed man. Help! help! (*Exit quickly R. H., and re-enters with Pike, Killjoy, and two servants—Maurice enters same time*).

Maur. Which way went it, father?—art sure thine eyes did not deceive thee?

Jack. Verily! my son, I saw it but e'en now—a white-robed figure flitting noiselessly along the Gallery—plainly as I see thee.

Maur. I see no sign of it, and dare affirm it ne'er hath entered here. Its rightful haunt is in the Abbey ruins, and thou knowest that ghosts do well observe their proper time and place. Let us discourse of other matters. Perchance it may return.

Jack. They were a noble race, these Nevilles, though our foes. See how yon grizzled warrior frowns on the usurper of his princely heritage! (*pointing to Sir Roland*). See how patiently sweet Lady Mary's face pleads, as though she would beseech our clemency towards her child, the lovely Lady



"Check mated by a Woman after all."

Laura, brave as fair : would she had been mated with thee, son Maurice. I could almost find in my heart to weep for that dear maid, untimely dead and driven hence by me. (*Turns to her picture and sees Laura in its place, or standing exactly under it a facsimile*).

Lady L. I am that Lady Laura, and thy fate is sealed. Base man, thy villainies avail thee nought. That Charter which thou deem'st so safe is now in other and far higher keeping, even in the King's! He (*points to Pike*) hath but the counterfeit.

Jack. What's this? A ghost! a witch! Here's treason, my trusty followers! Fire upon her! (*Jackson takes out pistol and presents it*).

Maur. (*Standing before Laura*). What, father! Would'st shoot a woman? Fie on ye all for cowards! (*Takes her in his arms*). Now, touch her at your peril.

Jack. Upon the knaves; seize them and bind them fast. (*They are advancing when curtain opens, Sir Ralph and General Monk rush on, followed by soldiers, who present arms at Jackson and followers*).

Lady L. (*Rushing to him*). My father!

Maur. Ye are right welcome, gentlemen.

Pike. Checkmated by a woman, after all!

Monk. To you, young man, I render my heartiest thanks for your prompt assistance and zeal in his Majesty's cause. Arrest those traitors! (*Guard march down to them*). Ye are my prisoners in the King's name.

Jack. Son Maurice, what meanest this? Thou hast betrayed the cause and thine own father. May my curse for ever light——

Maur. Not so, Sire; but to save that fair and noble lady from your base designs, and to right honest men, have I helped to compass this deed.

Monk. Enough of this! Away with the rebels! (*They are taken off by guards, R. 1 E.*) We must proceed to the great hall, there to meet his Majesty. Sir Ralph, be pleased to lead the way. (*Exeunt L. 1 E.*)

END OF SCENE V.

THE KING GIVES CHECK.

SCENE VI.—(*Last*)—*The Great Hall—The King discovered on Throne—The Great Banner of Ravenstone at back of Chair—Royal Banner each side of King—Soldiers, Peasants, and Servants fill up back of Stage—General Jackson, Pike, and Killjoy are marched on, R. 1 E., as prisoners at opening of Scene—Grand flourish and shout of “Long Live the King,” till Laura is on and kneeling.*

Lady L. Welcome, my liege and Royal Sovereign, back to our ancient halls, and to thy native land. I have a boon to crave.

King. Kneel not to me, fairest and best of women. Remember my promise to thee during the siege, to grant whatever boon thou should'st ask, if ever I regained my father's throne. But first, to punish that most fiendish, arch plotter, yclept, Sir Lionel De Vere: bring him here at once, and let us know if he has aught to say in his defence.

Jack. May it please your Majesty, he now sleeps under this roof, and deems himself my guest: he was so but an hour ago; and I am loth that any harm should come to him who counts on my protection. I pray you let him go scathless.

Lady L. Your Majesty, the boon I would crave is that in thine hour of triumph thou wilt remember mercy, and spare his life who dispossessed me of my heritage in course of bloody war—even for his son's sake, the noble Maurice! who stood by me, my friend through all.

King. Thy boon is granted, lady. Ye are free, sirrah, from all pains and penalties for bearing arms against our Royal self. Yet for prudence's sake I must dismiss thee hence, lest any future rising or sedition trouble the peace and safety of our realm. But, in our new estate of fair Virginia, we do assign you a goodly territory to hold and govern in my name henceforth, and trust your loyalty will not fail a second time. But we hope still to retain the noble Maurice at our Court, where we will appoint him to such offices as best may prove his merits, and expect still much fair service at his hands. Kneel down, young man, and rise, Sir Maurice Jackson! (*King draws sword and Knights him*).

Maur. (*Rising*). I thank your Majesty with all my heart, but must decline the post of honour you assign me about your person. I could not leave my father in his old age, to dwell alone in a strange land; but will ever

devote my sword to your service, and pray an opportunity may soon arise to prove my loyalty by deeds, not words. (*Bows and goes to his father*).

King. Why tarry the Guards? Where is yon traitor, base Sir Lionel, hid?

Pike. And if it might please your Majesty to allow your poor servant free speech, I could expound several questions touching this strange business.

King. Speak, sirrah! What hast thou to say about this foul treachery?

Pike. I say, your Majesty, that her Uncle, Sir Lionel de Vere, laid a most vile plot against this lady's life and happiness, through spite unto her father, who, during the war, left him guardian of his daughter, and the entire control of his estate; and he having accidentally discovered the Royal Charter, resolved, with fiendish malice, thereon to build his niece and brother's ruin. He immediately acquainted Cromwell with the existence of the Deed, and betrayed unto General Jackson the defenceless state of Ravenstone, and by this act of treachery made his peace with the Parliament, and preserved his own estate from confiscation; and not content with having driven the damsel from her home, forged divers letters, purporting to prove her lover's, Lord St. Clair's, most shameful infidelity and death, and sent them by her father's messenger, not knowing where she hid. Now, gentles, I have thrown some light upon this matter. I trust your most gracious Majesty will grant me a reprieve.

King. (*To General Jackson*). Is this man to be trusted? Doth he speak truly? I ask you on the honour of a soldier?

Jack. And on that honour I tell you, Charles Stuart, that he hath told you truly, but *not all*. He hath sought to lay the whole blame on his confederates, whereas a heavy share lay at his own door. But for their instructions I ne'er had found the Charter—it was so deftly hid. As for myself, I ever fought openly and bravely under my late lamented glorious chieftain's orders. Do with me as you will—I fear not death; but if I live, I will swear to fight for your Majesty as faithfully and valiantly as I have served the mighty Cromwell!! I have said!!! (*Folds his arms*).

King. A brave man truly, and honest as times go. Shall we be merciful? How say you, my lords?

Enter Guards with Sir Lionel, L. C.

Lady L. I pray you, my liege, for the sake of my sweet cousin, who hath lately passed away, let him go scathless.

Sir R. (*Half drawing sword*). That, I swear to Heaven, he shall not, if this arm strike alone!!!

King. Calm thee, old friend; we must be just as well as merciful. (*To Sir Lionel*). How now, vile traitor; hast aught to say in thy defence? Know that the King at last *gives check* to thy malpractices, and here thou standest arraigned before thy once fellow-peers for thy base treasons to thy King and country, and much more fiendish cruelty to this thy niece, thy brother's only child. Well mayest thou cringe and cower for mercy, but 'tis no word for thee.

Sir L. (*Aside*). So it has come to this at last. I have one more card to play. (*Aloud*). I had a debt to pay: know that she you uphold there is a murderess and a witch, and I can prove it, happen what may to me. 'Twas she who drove my daughter mad with her hell broth called tea, and other foul drugs and sleeping potions.

Lady L. Nay, Uncle, but only by the sad truth of Sir Walter's death untimely told.

Sir L. Mark well her confusion (*as at this accusation Lady Laura hides her head on her father's shoulder, and shrinks from him*); let her be tried by water, she'll not sink, I warrant ye. I swore I'd have revenge at any cost for the loss of my poor child. And it is mine at last! I plotted, toiled, and waited long enough to see this hour, and not in vain. Look how she falters! Revenge! Revenge! Oh! it is sweet unto the souls of mortals! My hand hath filled the cup of destiny with this intoxicating draught, and now I'll drain it to the dregs. The proof is, that she hath this very day appeared in three separate, different, forms—first unto Master Pike as the rich widow Lovegold, then to General Jackson as the ghost of Lady Maude, and last, not least, even as you now behold her. I ask if it be possible for any Christian woman, by fair and lawful means, to impose thus on so many persons of sound judgment?

Pike. Wert thou, indeed, the widow too?

Lady L. Aye, the widow Lovegold, and gained my object, for I took the real Charter, after our loving cup, when you lay nodding in your chair, and left the forged one in its place.

Monk. Nay, then, she must be a fairy, and a good one too, who thus can change her shape at pleasure unto such wise and witty ends. How says your Majesty?

King. I think so too—nay, am quite sure of it: in proof whereof we do condemn this lovely witch (*Sir Lionel looks at Laura and Sir Ralph with triumph*) unto the perpetual charge of this stern gaoler. Stand forth, St. Clair! and arrest the prisoner (*St. Clair disguised in cloak and hat, enters, rushes to Laura, who utters an exclamation of joy—they embrace*), who is to be bound in chains and fetters of solid gold, during his right good will and pleasure; and that her loyalty to her King and country and her heroic defence of this place should never be forgotten, we do create her Countess of Ravenstone and Vere, and, as a fitting dower, we do bestow upon her the manor and lands of Drayton, forfeited by her base kinsman, Sir Lionel de Vere, now an attainted traitor, lying at the King's mercy.

Lady L. Eustace! Alive!!!

St. Clair. Laura! my own dear love! (*They embrace, and go up with Sir Ralph*).

King. Let Sir Lionel de Vere be forthwith conveyed to our good Tower of London, there to answer with his life for this most foul treason and other offences.

Sir L. Master Pike, I have you to thank for this: all is not ended yet between us twain. (*To the King*). Charles Stuart, I prophesy that thy return will be the Kingdom's curse. I leave mine with ye all, but most of all with thee (*to Sir Ralph*) and the foul witch, thy daughter, who together have conspired to baulk me of mine end.

King. Away with him! Stop his rebel tongue! (*Exit Sir Lionel, guarded*). And now, my friend, I trust that thou art satisfied.

Sir R. Your Majesty's goodness overwhelms me. I trust ere long to pay this weighty honour back in better coin than words. (*Bows to Charles*).

Maur. (*Coming down with Laura*). Come, father, let us take our leave at once.

St. Clair. I pray you stay, and share our wedding feast.

Maur. "Nay, that were too hard a task for any mere mortal man, to gaze ungrudgingly on that rich jewel he once had well nigh deemed his own, set in the breast-plate of another; it were to lift the bowl of Tantalus, brimming with joy, unto the parched lips of some poor thirsty traveller, and bid him not quaff the precious nectar; yet, lady, believe me, I as much rejoice in thy new found happiness as if it were my own, albeit, henceforth I own no

mistress but my country and her cause." Farewell! for ever! (*Kisses her hand and bows low*).

Lady L. My benison go with thee, Maurice Jackson, where'er thou roamest. Mayest thou ere long find one more worthy than myself, and free to love thee well. Adieu!

King. And now, Sir Ralph, suppose you lead the way to supper, (*comes down from dais*) and we will toast the future bride and bridegroom to all hours. Here, comrades, is wherewithal to drink the happy couple's and your Sovereign's healths. (*Throws purse to soldiers*). We bid ye follow their bright example and "*Aimèz Loyauté*." The wedding must take place three days from this, and we ourselves will tarry yet a little space and give away the bride.

Lady L. Oh! what a tangled web is this our life, the warp of sorrow and the woof of joy, through which hope's golden thread runs strangely blent. Thank Heaven, I've lived to see my Sovereign liege restored. May he henceforth reign more firmly in the hearts of his subjects than by their swords alone. It only now remains (*to audience*) for you to crown my cup of joy, and dower us richly with your good opinion. And we trust that all here present will soon pay another visit to his Majesty's Court—now that the lost Charter is found, the Roundheads' raid is over, and from Ravenstone once more floats the "*King's Banner*."

Here the orchestra strikes up either "God Save the King," which was really composed in honour of Charles II., Lady Laura singing solos and changing to Queen at 2nd verse, as a compliment to Her Most Gracious Majesty, most appropriate, or one verse of "The Glorious Cause," according to taste of manager, but it should be the former decidedly.

The inverted comma passages all through mark no quotations from the works of others, but only those passages which have been considered the best by all great actors and other judges who have read the Play—compare with Chivalry, &c.

APPENDIX.

[The following reads from page 5, seventh line from foot, as originally intended, before the Play was reduced to Four Acts.]

Miller. Nay, but this is too much of a joke. Peace, man, to thy prating, and hands off, I say, or I will cudgel the life out of thee. (*Seizing his stout oak staff, and wielding it over Uriah's head. At this moment there is a general cry of "Down with the villain!" from the villagers; "Cudgel him!" "Duck him in the horse-pond!" Uriah is seized by Humphrey and a stout young blacksmith, who pinion his arms behind him, carry him off and duck him, cudgelling him soundly. They are about to carry him off to the stocks for breaking the peace, when Geoffrey appears on the stage. The Miller holds his sides and shakes with laughter at his dripping appearance; meanwhile his daughter intercedes for the culprit.*)

Mabel. Father, they will beat him to death; see, he is nearly drowned already. Surely the poor man is mad; will you not stay them?

Miller. It will do him no harm, child—the pestilent rascal! a plague on him for spoiling our day's sport. But thou wert ever too gentle, May. Odzooks! but he looks like a drowned rat. Ha! ha! ha! ha!

Geoffrey approaches him.

Geoffrey. By my halidome, Master Miller, what is this I see?

Miller. Only that canting fool, Uriah Killjoy, the Methodist preacher, has for once met his deserts, and had a rare ducking—that's all. But thou art somewhat tardy in thy coming, methinks, Master Geoffrey. Here is thy sweetheart, ready to give thee a sound rating for thy pains, I'll warrant me. Nevertheless, thou art welcome, lad; sit down, take a glass.

Geoffrey. Nay, good neighbour, that I dare not, for I come with heavy news, and must despatch mine errand with all speed, which, when thou knowest, thou wilt pardon my seeming tardiness; thou, too, sweet Mabel. Let yon knave go, for my news brooks no delay; but see thou that he skulks not within hearing. Then come and listen all of ye.

Miller. (*Shouts out*). That will do, lads; ye have cudgelled him enough for this bout. Let the knave go, I say; we must leave a few bones in his body against another time, though I doubt not his skin will bear witness to this for many a day. Let him go, I say (*angrily*), 'tis my order, and Master Geoffrey here. (*They desist unwillingly*).

M

Uriah. I crave your mercy, good Master Miller; verily, they have nearly slain me. I thank you, worshipful Master Geoffrey, for your timely aid. (*Muttering, aside, "Go to the devil, the whole pack of ye, but I'll be revenged for this."* *Exit, hobbling and shaking his stick at them.*)

Miller. (*Calling after him.*) See thou loiter not, nor listen to our converse, for if we catch thee thou shalt not escape the pillory next time; besides, you know listeners never hear any good of themselves.

Uriah. (*Turns round with the expression of a fiend.*) I'll be even with thee, ye spawn of Satan. I'll be even with ye. (*Exit finally.*)

Miller. What said he?

Humphrey. Let him go, and keep a sharp look out against skulkers. He was only blessing his enemies after their goodly fashion. Now to hear the news. (*They all crowd round Geoffrey.*)

Geoffrey. Now, friends and neighbours, know that I come with heavy tidings from our noble landlord, Sir Ralph Neville. He has just received despatches to say that war has broken out again; there is, I believe, a rising in Kent under my Lord Goring, another under Duke Hamilton—all to rescue the King from prison. But be that as it may, our master, Sir Walter, and Lord Eustace, are to join the Duke's standard by to-morrow at sunset, with all the men and horses they can muster. And he has sent me to warn ye all to look to your arms and nags, and assemble without fail in the Great Hall of the Castle by this midnight. Master Humphrey will marshal ye, but my Lord said he had need of his services at home, so he is not to march with us this bout, and I must away in all haste to fetch Sir Lionel de Vere to the Castle.

Barbara. Then my lady will be wanting me, for surely she will soon be flitting; so good e'en to you, neighbours, I'm off for one. (*She runs away and looks back coquettishly to see if any one will follow her, but no one stirs.*)

Miller. War again! Just as we were as snug as bees in a hive. Yet I'm glad on't. Oh for the good old days, when the King shall enjoy his own again. One more toast, lads, before we part—Here's for the King! (*They all start up and drink the toast with a loud shout, striking their hands on their hearts, and those who have swords or clubs draw or flourish them, and add, "and God bless him!"* *Exeunt all except the Miller, Dorothy, Mabel, and Geoffrey.*)

Miller. I am sorry for thee, lad, for my poor Mabel's sake; but trust in Providence. I wish you safely back again, and luck to your arms, my boy. (*Wringing his hand.*) Come, mother, they will want to say good-bye. (*They retire, Dorothy wiping her eyes with her apron.*)

Mabel. And wilt thou leave me, Geoffry, so soon? Would I could follow thee, even as thy page, for my heart bodes sorrow to us both in this journey. I know not why, but I fear me we shall never meet again. My father is rich; let him send another in thy place. I know Sir Walter is so good and gentle, I'm sure he'd listen to my prayer. I'd plead with him to spare thee, even on my bended knees. Oh don't leave me, or let us be wedded at once, and I will share thy perils even unto the death.

Geoffrey. (*Embraces her tenderly.*) Alas! my sweet Mabel, it cannot be. I never could desert my master in the hour of need; besides, what would they say of me? They'd call me a coward and cur to eat at his board in times of mirth and plenty, and when the trumpet sounds, to fly! No, I would rather die a thousand deaths than suffer it.

Mabel. That they dare not.

Geoffrey. Besides, girl, there is a chance of winning honour. I may save some noble's life,

perhaps a prince's, and be made Squire for it, instead of simple yeoman. Think of that! And then the spoil—I'll bring thee everything I take—kirtles, laces, ribbons, necklaces, aprons. May be thou'lt be as richly decked for our bridal as my Lady Laura.

Mabel. But wilt thou be the very same Geoffrey to me then? (*Searchingly.*) Not all the wealth this world could give would make up for the loss of thy dear love.

Geoffrey. How canst thou doubt me, darling? Have I not been thy true love from May Day to Candlemas? See, here is a broken sixpence. I'll hang it round thy neck by this blue ribbon I have brought thee. And now I must away, for time presses, and thy sorrow doth unman me. God bless thee, Mabel darling! I'll soon be back again—I hope a greater man. Good bye! (*He kisses her hurriedly and leaves her weeping in her mother's arms. As he crosses the bridge he waves his hand to them in token of farewell.*)

Music strikes up one verse of "Good-bye, Sweetheart, Good-bye." Scene closes.

Relating to Mabel, the Miller's daughter, in my own original five act play, she was struck blind, in the second act, in a great thunderstorm in the forest; but after the play had been first read by two leading actors, and pronounced too long and rambling for representation, I cut out that episode altogether, as that was the weakest part of my work, and, consequently, the two extra chapters of Geoffry and blind Mabel, as well as quantities of other matter. Nor have I since regretted this. I only now insert her love and dying scenes because it is also my own creation entirely, and might serve as an introduction to the intended grand finale of the play, namely, the crossing of the wedding and funeral scenes from it. The third Boudoir scene in first act, and the fifth scene from second act, were played by Herr and Mrs. Bandmann, with a musical interlude, last December, at the Theatre Royal, Dublin. I now await the verdict of the press and public, as to whether I do or do not deserve a fair hearing on the stage.

I. S. CRESSWELL.

This scene, which was originally intended to be the prelude to the grand finale of my Play—namely, the crossing on the stage of the wedding and funeral processions—and has been since suppressed by a friend's advice, is only legibly transcribed here as a fitting conclusion to the episode of blind Mabel's story, should that character be introduced at all, and as giving rise to one of the most beautiful and touching scenes in the Play. I do not *now expect* it to be acted; I only wish it read by my musical friend, Mr. Sutherland, or at the manager's good will and pleasure.

SCENE BEFORE THE MILLER'S COTTAGE.

Blind Mabel in a quiet Puritan garb, with something of a close white coif or cap, seated in an arm chair before the door at her spinning-wheel—waterfall in full play at back—mill-wheel going round—a set scene—Miller comes down steps, covered with flower—he speaks to her.

Miller. "Well, my own lass, my flower of May, how fares it with thee this bright morning? Thou lookest as pale and drooping as a lily yet. But cheer up; I'll send your mother to you

anon, and she will doubtless bring a cordial that'll do ye more good than all the doctor's stuff. Ha! ha! I must be off now, or there'll be no grist to the mill. Where is the old wife, I wonder? I've news for her that'll make her feel quite young again."

Mabel. (Lovingly). Father, dear father, how good you are to your poor blind child. I think mother's just inside the kitchen. I'm as well as usual, thank'ee.

SCENE OUTSIDE MILLER'S COTTAGE.

Mabel. "And I love to sit in the sunshine, and smell the new-mown hay, and the birds sing so sweetly. I can almost see the honey-cups in the croft meadow, and dream I am a little girl again." (*Miller stoops and kisses her, fondly strokes her hair.*)

Miller. "God bless thee, my pet lamb; thou'rt always contented and thankful in spite of your poor eyes. 'Twould be well if there were more like ye in the world. I must be off to work now, so good-bye."

Mabel. (Stroking his face fondly). "Good-bye, dear father. I, too, have work to do for Lady Laura before the sun goes down. She says there's no yarn in all the village so smoothly spun as mine."

Miller. (Proudly). "That I can well believe." (*Exit Miller, whistling a lively tune.*)

Mabel. "What a blessing work is. My life has been quite happy since my Lady taught me to spin. Is that you, mother? Make haste and tell me the good news father said he had for you—I do so long to hear it." (*Coaxingly.*)

Enter Dorothy, looking troubled and anxious.

Dorothy. (Aside). "I wonder can she bear it? Well, darling, how do you feel to-day?"

Mabel. (Sadly). "Mother, why do you ask me that? I'm as well as I shall ever be in this world, but I know I'll never live to see another hay-making. I get weaker and weaker every day; but I should like to die in the spring-time, and have loads of flowers strewn on my grave; and mind you lay me in the sunshine; for that will be a happy day for me when I can see you all again." (*Puts her arms round her mother's neck.*)

Dorothy. (Weeping). "Oh, my child, don'tee talk so. I know its because your lonesome after Master Geoffrey; and no wonder, when he's been away so many weary years. But cheer up, lass; there's a good time coming soon; and maybe you'll have your lover back again before you reckon. I heard your father say just now he was wanted up to the hall, for some great folks had arrived last night, and some *do* say (*cautiously*) that its our old master, Sir Ralph, and Lord St. Clair, if not the King himself, God bless him." (*Watches the effect of her words.*)

Mabel. "And if he were back, mother, 'twould be too late for *me* to be his wife; you don't suppose I'd be the burden on him I am to you and father now; no, no. (*Shakes her head sadly.*) I love him far too well for that; but I should just like to *see* him *once* more before I go to rest. I feel sure I shall, for I had a dream about him last night; I'll tell it you, mother." [Then she sings a beautiful song about her lover, blindness, and seeing her lover in it, something like "I cannot mind my wheel, mother," turning her spinning-wheel as a sort of accompaniment to the first verse, then letting it stop. This song, the gem of the whole scene, will be composed, with words and music, if it is acted, by my friend Mr. George Sutherland, who has kindly consented to do all the words and music for me]. Mabel breaks off suddenly with "Mother, my heart told me true; I feel him coming

to me ; now look, mother" (*stretches out her hands wildly*), and there, sure enough, is Geoffrey crossing the bridge at back, slowly advancing behind them.

Dorothy looks up and runs to meet him, exclaiming joyfully—"Well, I never did see the like of this before ; 'tis *himself* surely. Welcome, welcome back, my lad, a thousand times. He will be the best doctor for her, after all. But how to tell him of her blindness? 'Twill well nigh break his heart, poor fellow." (*This aside*).

Geoffrey, aside, meanwhile communes thus with himself in a voice hoarse with emotion.

Geoffrey. "How shall I tell her the truth, base knave that I am? How shall I meet her sweet look of love and trust?"

Dorothy. (Approaching him). "You're right welcome home again, Master Geoffrey ; we were but just talking of you. You've come just in time to save my poor child's life, for she has nearly fretted herself into her grave, thinking about you, and how mayhap you'll not care for her *now*. She's blind (*this in a half whisper*) ; she's been blind these seven years past ; but I told her that was all nonsense, for them that loves truly nought makes any difference except disgrace, and now I shall die happy that she's got some one to love and cherish her when we old folks are gone."

That's right, as Geoffrey takes Mabel in his close embrace into his arms, exclaiming, "Mabel, my own poor darling girl, blind, sayest thou, mother? Oh, this is worse and worse."

Dorothy. (Only seeing them embrace). "Now I must run and tell father you're come back. (*Is going off*).

Geoffrey. (Groaning, aside). "Oh, what a wretch am I. No, no ; I am not worthy of such love. Her very kiss is torture." (*Puts her back gently in her chair, as Mabel, weeping for joy, feels his face all over tenderly, which she calls seeing, and notes how his beard has grown*).

Geoffrey. Had I but known the truth I would have cut off my sword arm rather than thus have wronged her. May God forgive me. (*Weeps aside*).

Mabel. (Faintly). What is the matter. Oh, Geoffrey, speak to me. I am so happy now, you've come ; but now I'm blind. I mustn't keep you to your promise, dear. I know I'm not much longer for *this* world ; and when I'm laid at rest you must find another good girl to comfort you *instead*. I should not like to leave you all alone in the wide world.

Geoffrey. (Sobbing). Oh, Mabel, stop for pity's sake ! I cannot bear thy gentle speech. I am not worthy thine angelic constancy. Thou dost heap coals of fire upon my head. Make me loathe myself, a heartless villain. It must out. (*Kneels down before her*.) Hate me ! Curse me ! Spare not reproach for my foul deed ! Know thou *I have a wife already*. After my poor master died I followed Lord St. Clair, and all the Court, to France. When my lord returned here, at the siege, I lay sore wounded. I could not write ; but tried, at first, to send a token of my love by a Jew pedlar. It miscarried. I grew heartsore over there during those long years, away from all my kith's kin and fellow-countrymen. I heard, too, thou wert keeping company with Master Humphrey ; but now I know its false ; and I met with a good little French girl, Annette, a Breton farmer's daughter, who tended me when I was sick there, once upon a time. She was so sweet and simple in her ways, I could not choose but love her, and so we married ; and she has come home with me to dwell in my own land. We have a little child ; but had I only known that thou wert blind I never had thus forsaken thee ; and now I've killed thee. I shall *hate* her and the *child* too.

Mabel. (Mabel interrupting him and gasps). No, no ; that thou must *not*. See, I forgive thee freely, fully, even though thou could'st not wait till I had *set* thee free. (*During his narrative a*

ghastly change comes over poor Mabel's countenance ; she is denied even the grace of releasing her lover. At these words she bends down over him, extending her hands in token of forgiveness. He seizes and kisses them wildly, still kneeling before her and sobbing.)

Mabel. But it will soon be all over now. I go beyond the reach of pain, where there's no marriage nor giving in marriage, no sorrow or tears ; and there or thence I shall look down and smile on thee and thine. Thou must redeem the past by being good to her. This is my last request ; and now go fetch them quickly ; my time below is short. *(This last part in jerks, gasping for breath.)*

Geoffrey. And you forgive me thus ? Oh, what angels are some women—what demons men ! But nevermore shall I forgive myself. *(To Dorothy.)* Rail on, good mother, I deserve all the foul names that thou canst call me ; 'tis some relief to be thus well abused. Oh, to work out some penance for my crime. *(Exit Geoffrey hastily.)*

(At the news of his marriage Dorothy begins.) Oh thou vile wretch ; thou most inhuman monster ; to steal a young girl's heart, and carry it away with thee across the sea ; to be cast aside, aye, at a moments notice, even as a withered flower whose beauty fades, and in its place to set a gaudy painted tinsel ornament—a French woman forsooth. *(With rising indignation.)* Fie on thee ! Fie on thee, villain ! Get thee hence, or I will have thee soundly cudgelled out of the village.

Dorothy. "Thou hast broken her heart at last, my child, my child." *(Weeps bitterly.)* "Dare not to take her hand. Thy very touch pollutes her ; oh ! but her father will be well avenged on thee for this." *(Shakes her fist at him savagely.)*

Mabel. "Peace, mother, if thou lovest me." *(She moves Geoffrey off.)* "My time draws near ; come, listen to me, mother." *(Dorothy leans over her chair fondly.)*

Mabel. "Thou must forgive him ; and make father too, even for my sake ; 'tis the last thing I shall ever ask you, and you surely won't refuse me this." *(Pleadingly.)*

Dorothy. "Oh ! my child, anything thou wilt, so that thou do but live to cheer us."

Mabel. "Thank you, dear mother, I feel happier now. Tell me of Lady Laura, whom I have not seen these three days past ?"

Dorothy. "Oh ! my lady's happy enough after all her troubles, her sweetheart, Lord St. Clair's, come back with the King, all safe and sound ; and she's to be married in three days' time."

Mabel. "I rejoice to hear it ; my dear, sweet lady ; my best friend in the world ; commend me to her, but keep the secret of my death from her awhile, till all the wedding rites be o'er ; I would not for the world that tidings of my fate should cast a shadow on her marriage morn ; promise me this, dear mother." *(Earnestly.)*

(At this moment before Dorothy can reply, Geoffrey re-enters with his wife, Annette, on his arm, and she either carrying or leading a little child about three years old ; she wears a high-crowned Normandy cap.)

Dorothy. *(Angrily.)* "Here comes yon vile impostor and his wife."

Mabel. "Remember your promise ; speak gently to her."

(Annette in wonder and admiration.)

Annette. "Quelle Ange y, she has the face of a Madonna." *(Approaching Mabel, reverently pleading.)* "Oh ! madam, I pray you forgive me for marrying poor Geoffrey ; indeed I did not know he was your lover ; I did not mean to steal him from you—but I do love him so."

Mabel. "Hush, hush, poor child, how should you know ? I have forgiven all."

Annette. "Quelle bonté suprême ; she is a saint already ; so good, so patient—yet blind. Madam, we will pray for you day and night ; perhaps you may even yet——"

Mabel. (Interrupting her faintly). "The child, where is it? (Gropes about for it, Geoffrey puts it into her arms ; she feels it all over its face, then says :—"It is like him." (Kisses it passionately, and gives it back to its mother ; then feels for and joins their hands.) "See that ye dwell in peace together ; one kiss, my mother." (Kisses Dorothy). "Good bye—God bless ye all." (Then sinks back and dies in Geoffrey's arms.

TABLEAU—CURTAIN.



